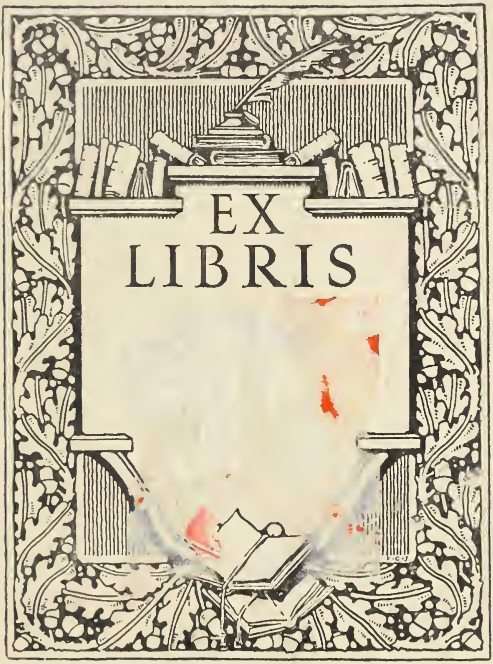
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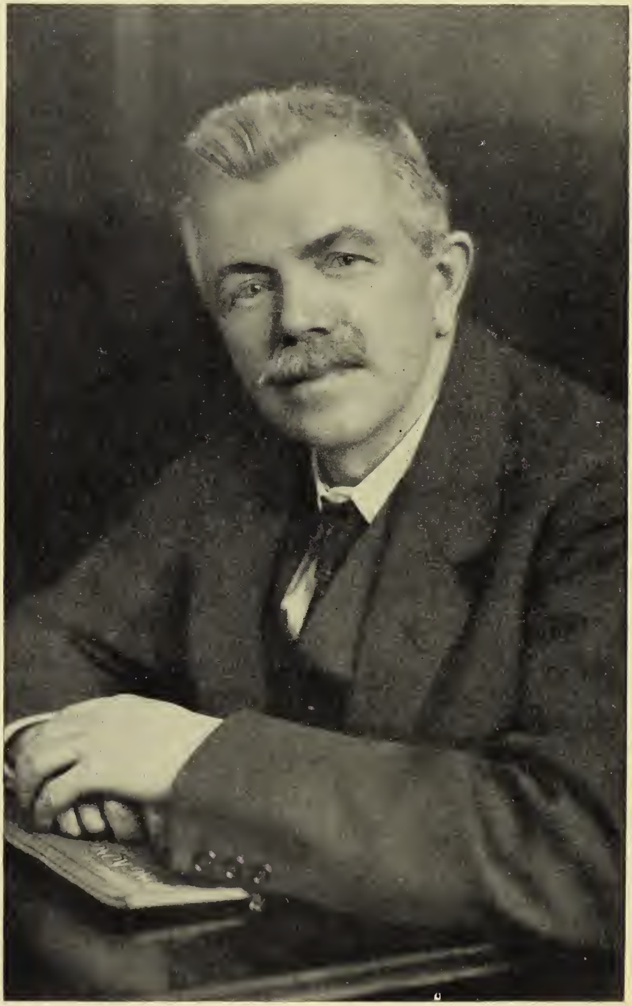

RIGHT HON. J. R. CLYNES, P.C., M.P., D.C.L.

The Rt. Hon.

J. R. CLYNES

P.C., M.P., D.C.L.

MEMOIRS

1869–1924

WITH NINETEEN ILLUSTRATIONS

HUTCHINSON & CO. (*Publishers*) LTD.
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I HAVE TRIED, IN THIS BOOK, TO TELL A TRUE STORY OF MY EXPERIENCES IN BRITISH POLITICS DURING THE LAST FORTY YEARS. MY ACCOUNT MAY CAUSE DISAPPOINTMENT TO SOME AND ANGER TO OTHERS ; BUT I HOPE THAT ALL WILL CREDIT ME WITH HAVING TRIED TO BE IMPARTIAL AND SINCERE.

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TO

MY WIFE,

WITHOUT WHOSE HELP AND COMRADESHIP
I SHOULD HAVE LITTLE TO RECORD.

2323765

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance given by Mr. F. S. Stuart in compiling much of the material from which this book has been written.

CONTENTS

Chapter I

PAGE

Before 1875—The curtain rises on a National drama—Social conditions—Industrial England in revolt—The Labour Representation League—Burt and MacDonald—Liberal pressure on Labour M.P.s—Keir Hardie's career—The father of British Labour 17

Chapter II

1875–1885—My early years—School days—Working as a piecer—Day-dreams—Learning words from a dictionary—Teaching myself grammar—My three blind fates—A book that shaped my life—Practising oratory in a disused quarry—Letters to the Editor 27

Chapter III

1885–1888—Going through the mill—The " Piecer " Letters—I go on strike alone—Forming a Piecers' Union—Public speaking—Books that helped me—Meeting my wife—Strikes and hunger-marches—The Leeds Bridge battle—Ben Tillet—Burns and Mann—William Morris and G. B. Shaw 43

Chapter IV

1888–1892—Life as a tub-thumper—Slips of the tongue—Helping a new Union—Will Thorne—Leaving the mill—Working as an " agitator "—Marriage on 40s. a week—The Tolpuddle Martyrs—Inspecting pickets in a lamplighters' strike 56

Chapter V

PAGE
1892–1896—An historic Congress at Bradford—Formation of the I.L.P.—Robert Blatchford—First meeting with G. B. S.—An International Conference at Zurich—Argument by weapons—A cotton strike—Nationalisation proposed—Nearly mobbed—Early Trade Union work . 69

Chapter VI

1896–1902—Formation of the Labour Party—Ramsay MacDonald—The Labour Representation Committee—The "Khaki Election"—Queen Victoria's death—The Taff Vale decision—Labour consternation—Winston Churchill in 1901 83

Chapter VII

1896–1906—The shadow of Labour across the floor—I am invited to contest a by-election—Will Crooks—Fred Bramley—Some Labour women—Avoiding prison—General Election, 1906—What Labour offered—I contest Manchester North-East—Kicking off with Winston Churchill—Joe Toole—The price of victory—The Liberals try to absorb us—Organising at Westminster . . 98

Chapter VIII

1906–1908—First experiences as an M.P.—Expenses at Westminster—Impressions of the House of Commons—Electing the Speaker—Impatient Labour men—The King's Speech—The Chamberlains—Mr. Balfour—Asquith—Birrell—Some maiden speeches—F. E. Smith—Labour pressure 113

Chapter IX

1908–1909—MacDonald's maiden speech—Work in the Commons—Land ownership—Campbell-Bannerman's death—Asquith plays "General Post"—Old Age Pensions—I meet trouble in the Commons—The Osborne judgment—Four dreadnoughts or eight?—Ll. G.'s 1909 Budget—Daylight Saving efforts—Lords *v.* Commons—Two General Elections 124

Chapter X

PAGE

1910–1911—President of a Labour Conference—I visit Canada and the United States—Problems of American Labour—Death of Edward VII—Another General Election—Asquith attacked in the Commons—A speech on Unemployment — Suffragettes — The Agadir incident — Parliament faces a grave risk of war 138

Chapter XI

1911–1914—A strike that nearly caused a European war—Mrs. MacDonald—More big strikes—National Health and Unemployment Bills—£400 a year for M.P.s—The *Titanic* inquiry—A visit to Germany and Austria—Labour warnings of coming war—The Irish M.P.s—I visit Ireland—June and July, 1914 152

Chapter XII

August, 1914—The Fleet stands by—A Peace Conference in Brussels—British Labour works for peace—Financial panic in London—Declarations of war—Sir Edward Grey's moves—August 3rd in the Commons—MacDonald declares for peace—Resignations—My statement on the war—Criminal war-time finance—Propaganda—" Not a yard of German colonies " 164

Chapter XIII

August, 1914–1915—Asquith and Kitchener—Early Allied disasters—Labour's war outlook—Financing the war from posterity—Trebitsch Lincoln, M.P., expelled from England—My food control proposals—Profiteering—Churchill and the Dardanelles—My War attitude attacked—The shell scandal—Trouble in the Cabinet—Labour joins the Coalition—Death of Keir Hardie—Rumours of Conscription 178

Chapter XIV

1915–1916—Military stalemate—More shell scandals—Munition strikes—Taking a deputation to France—In the front-line trenches—Under shell-fire—A tour of the battlefields—Conscription—Parliament meets in secret—Lloyd George nearly lost with Kitchener—Peace overtures in 1916 refused—More Cabinet splits—Asquith resigns—Lloyd George Prime Minister 192

Chapter XV

PAGE

1916–1917—The Allies face disaster—The French mutinies—Kitchener and the tanks—An M.P. fires the Rumanian oil-wells—Unrestricted submarine sinkings begin—Wilson's peace overtures rejected—Britain faces starvation—Russia collapses—The United States enter—Henderson goes to Russia—Henderson forced to resign from the Cabinet—A London air raid—I go to the Food Ministry—Threats of bread and meat famines averted . 205

Chapter XVI

1917—Lord Rhondda—A German *Lusitania* medal—Subsidising food production—Queues cause national panic—Britain nationalises food control—Food committees—Ration cards issued—Preventing big strikes—World wheat and meat shortage—Food prices reduced—Wilson's second peace proposal rejected—Other peace proposals—Failure at Ypres—Caporetto—British rout at St. Quentin—German forty-mile advance—Haig's desperate order—" The Germans have won the war "—Alarm in Parliament 221

Chapter XVII

1918—Holding on—A war of starvation develops—Rationing to prevent revolution—A food crisis—Trouble with the troops—Reducing queues—The Food Council—The Consumers' Council—My tasks in forming it—H. M. Hyndman—German plans for causing a world wheat shortage—Shipbuilders brought back from France—My fight against British Prohibition—President Wilson's " Fourteen Points "—Labour war aims—The League foreshadowed—Allenby takes Jerusalem—Germany's dying struggles—The Aisne and the Marne—Paris shelled . . . 233

Chapter XVIII

1918—Ostend and Zeebrugge raids to reduce submarine attacks—American troops in France—The Piave disaster—An American blizzard threatens our food—I become a P.C.—Death of Lord Rhondda—I am appointed Food Controller—Convoying the American Army results in a shipping shortage—Lloyd George saves England—Breakfasts at No. 10—Humour in Food Control—The Allied Food Controllers meet—My difficulties as Britain's Housekeeper 248

Chapter XIX

PAGE

1918—Food Ministry routine—Air raid experiences—Germany in retreat—Mr. Henderson attacked—Bulgaria surrenders—Austria smashed—Ludendorff disgraced—"The Captains and the Kings depart"—The German Fleet mutinies—Revolution in Germany—Flight of the Kaiser—I get news of the Armistice—London goes mad—Foch's terms—Lloyd George decides on a General Election—"Hang the Kaiser!"—Fantastic indemnities promised—Election sensations—Labour numbers increased 262

Chapter XX

1919—The tragedy of the Peace—Reparations fables—Changing the map of Europe—Quarrels at the Paris Conference—Collapse of President Wilson—Starving peaceful German women and children—Labours views on the peace terms—General Smuts protests—The three witches of Versailles—Labour manifestos—Disarmament hypocrisy—Breaking faith with the dead 276

Chapter XXI

1919—What the Peace Conference cost us—Food Ministry measures retained—The men who saved me from a lamp-post—Food Ministry accounts—A profit on national trading—Food control in future wars—Lloyd George on private armament firms—War profits—British troops mutiny—Formation of the League of Nations—I am made Doctor of Civil Laws at Oxford—The Victory March—The railway strike of 1919—Parliament greets the first woman M.P.—The coming of the Depression . 288

Chapter XXII

The Irish Question—The Act of Union—Disraeli on Ireland—The execution of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien—Parnell—Striking against rent—My memory of Gladstone—The Phœnix Park murders—Work of the Irish Party in the Commons—Memories of their leaders—Labour plans for Ireland—G.B.S. on Sinn Fein—Ireland and the war—The 1916 rising—Casement's revolver turns the tide—My views on Irish Conscription—Post-war problems—Ireland to-day 303

Chapter XXIII

PAGE

1920–1922—Coal troubles in Britain—The Triple Alliance threat—Civil war feared—Army preparations—" Black Friday "—The Government prevented from interfering in the Russo-Polish war—British naval concentration and leave stopped—Labour keeps the peace—I become Leader of the Labour Party—Work of a Party Leader—The Unknown Soldier is chosen—Labour leaders die poor—Fall of the Coalition—" Clynes's Band "—Labour's great election gains—MacDonald succeeds me—Mussolini —France invades the Ruhr 317

Chapter XXIV

1923–1924—Labour in Opposition—Critical political situation —Labour declares for a Capital Levy—Bonar Law retires —Baldwin becomes Premier—Death of Bonar Law—2,000,000 unemployed—Tory Protectionist policy declared—A critical General Election—Mussolini creates a new Serajevo situation—Rise of Adolf Hitler—Labour on the eve of power—Dangers of taking office—A momentous luncheon-party—I move a " No Confidence " vote—Fall of the Government—Sent for by King George—Labour in power 336

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Right Hon. J. R. Clynes, P.C., M.P., D.C.L. *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

Keir Hardie 22

Will Thorne, 1889 and 1934 62

Fred Bramley 100

Mr. J. R. Clynes, M.P., in 1906 114

Will Crooks 144

Mr. Clynes with his Elder Son, Lieutenant Clynes, and Private Stringer, V.C. 190

Lord Rhondda, Britain's Second Food Controller . 214

Medal struck by Germany in 1916 to Commemorate the Torpedoing of the "Lusitania" (*obverse and reverse*) 222

The King's Meat-Ration Card, 1918 226

The Consumers' Council, 1918 238

Mrs. Clynes making Bread in her Oldham Kitchen during the War-time Bread Shortage 256

Mr. Clynes addressing an Election Meeting at a great Ironworks 272

Troops in War Kit in Whitehall during the 1920 Coal Strike 318

Mr. Clynes (Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, 1920–1922) with Mrs. Clynes 322

Clynes's Band, Manchester, General Election, 1922 . 328

The "Big Five" in the First Labour Government, 1924 342

INTRODUCTION

The reasons for writing this book are, I hope, revealed in its pages.

I did not consider writing an account of my activities until a rare enjoyment of leisure a few years ago first presented me with the opportunity. I was then impelled to ask what kind of record I could prepare which would set forth anything different from that of millions of others who have lived the working-class life. The answer was that many men lived such a life, but few wrote about it.

I have read scores of books telling of family position, college training, professions, businesses and the like, but little has been put on record of the experiences of men who have had none of these blessings. That has been my case.

As one half of the world does not know how the other half lives, I write for some part of the half which until recently has perforce been silent.

This book is not an official history of the growth of organised Labour either in industry or politics. I can speak only of what I have seen, and the record is naturally incomplete and sometimes blurred.

There remain, however, many historical glimpses of great movements and of the groups of individuals who made them. There are impressions, however fleeting, of the indomitable Labour spirit, and of the peculiar difficulties and various qualities of the men who came into our ranks and moved to the front as Party leaders.

The rise of Labour has become an historical adventure greater than any of us dreamed. We who undertook the work in its beginnings when there was not one Labour man even on any Local Body, to say nothing of Parliament, had not the remotest notion that we should live to find ourselves in Cabinets as the rulers of our country.

Our country! Yes—we are as proud of it as any. We have worked joyously in our own way to try to serve it, and our first purpose was to get a country to serve. A hundred years ago, the sentiment and history of Britain belonged to its people, but the country was the private possession of a guarded few. Until the people can collectively possess the land without which none of us would be able to live, it cannot be said that the nation has a country at all!

In my story, political and Parliamentary events provide more material for description than Trade Union service. The country knows little of the sum total of good which is the yield of that service. The Unions were the pioneers and have led workmen on the road to Parliamentary liberty. If I have written little about the Unions, it is because they have always dealt in deeds rather than words.

The chief claim I make for many public duties is a little pride in having shared in the Union work. I have held more spectacular posts than Union ones, but the latter is the most valuable and necessary form of Labour service.

In the political field, Labour has performed its greatest single service by its endeavours towards international peace. These doctrines will in some later year eventually remove the fear and shadow of war from Europe.

After Labour was driven from office in 1931, certain statesmen failed to make the best of the chances of world disarmament that were then presented. I regard that as the most melancholy and disastrous failure in the political history of the Christian era.

Lasting peace can never rest on the terror of others' armaments. While the fear of war clouds the world, the advance of civilisation itself must remain in doubt.

> "There is a tide in the affairs of men,
> Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
> Omitted, all the voyage of their life
> Is bound in shallows and in miseries"

Our statesmen missed the tide in 1931, and we are paying for their error more highly with every passing year. If the dominant note throughout this book is an appeal for peace, it is because the peoples of the world can never escape from " the shallows and the miseries " of to-day so long as continued peace remains uncertain.

Voltaire has said that history is but a record of crimes and misfortunes. If that is so, then the people of the past have refused to learn from history, and have paid for their folly. There are recorded in this story enough political crimes and misfortunes to make the madness of war apparent to all. The 1914–18 fiasco was the reason and cause of them.

We have had enough of that. I hope that when those who are children now come to write their Memoirs, they will have made a better job of politics than we have done, and that war in Europe will be no more.

J. R. C.

August 1937

Chapter I

Before 1875—The curtain rises on a National drama—Social conditions—Industrial England in revolt—The Labour Representation League—Burt and MacDonald—Liberal pressure on Labour M.P.s—Keir Hardie's career—The father of British Labour.

Before 1875

When I look back, as through a telescope reversed, down the vista of the years since I was a small boy running barefoot over dangerous oily floors, keeping pace with spinning machinery in an Oldham cotton-mill, I realise with a shock that, since that time, England has been changed as at the sweep of a wizard's wand.

But there was no wizard. The almost incredible industrial reforms have been brought about, instead, largely by the courage, patience and sincerity of a band of self-educated visionaries in red ties and baggy trousers.

An engine-driver rose to the rank of Colonial Secretary, a starveling clerk became Great Britain's Premier, a foundry-hand was changed to Foreign Secretary, the son of a Keighley weaver was created Chancellor of the Exchequer, one miner became Secretary for War and another Secretary of State for Scotland, while I, the mill-boy, reached the position of Lord Privy Seal, so that I might lead the House of Commons, and, later, became Home Secretary. Other similar cases could be quoted.

The history we have written is not all set down on unblemished pages. Some amongst us have turned traitor. Some have been bought with position ; others have betrayed their trust for money. But, having admitted the worst, I claim this—that the story of these colleagues of mine who have so changed England is as fine as any fiction. Even those who have stained their records had very gallant records to stain.

My story is inextricably mingled with theirs, and the words of my tale may be merged, at times, in the epoch-shaking tramp of Labour marching from obscurity to Parliamentary power. If it seems, then, that the writing is hardly noble enough to match the epic, I crave indulgence. I learned my words by copying them laboriously from a dictionary at nights, nodding after relentless hours of cruel work at the mill. I am not an author, but a literary "Piecer," joining together the broken threads of history as they spin past on the mills of time.

1869 I was born in 1869. Of the personal side of my early experiences I shall tell in the next chapter.

But the middle decades of the last century gave birth to something of infinitely greater importance than myself and the others who were later to become the first Labour rulers of England.

A national idea was struggling for birth.

Before 1850, the belief had somehow been accepted by the majority of working Britishers that politics was a prerogative of the rich and titled. The average man had a vague faith that His Majesty the King ruled the land, ably assisted by "the gentry," whom Heaven had gifted with a peculiar aptitude for such things.

Sometimes a war resulted; sometimes there was poverty and famine; certainly life was dreary and perilous for all those who patiently pulled a forelock to vicar, squire and noble. But then—hadn't such things always been so! Weren't they inevitable!

Before 1850 Britain supposed that these last remarks were simply pious exclamations. Then thought changed; an inspiration flamed white-hot into existence; black question-marks were blotched into place after each.

Far-seeing, narrow-minded men possessing riches and honours strove swiftly to scratch out the question-marks with militiamen's sabre-points, or even to blot them out in workmen's blood. But they remained indelible;

they grew till they darkened the political skies; they are there yet, and now the hands of millions point to them, and only by answering can any man to-day win to Westminster.

The questions were not asked before their time.

Disraeli, writing from his own observations, gives us this description of an English country town shortly before 1850:

> "A variety of narrow and crowded lanes. . . . The gaping chinks admitted every blast . . . the thatch, yawning in some parts to admit the wind and wet, looked more like the top of a dunghill than a cottage. Before the doors of these dwellings ran open drains full of animal and vegetable refuse, decomposing into disease, while a concentrated solution of every sort of filth was allowed to soak through, and thoroughly impregnate, the walls and ground adjoining. . . . The virtuous mother in the sacred pangs of childbirth gives forth another victim to our thoughtless civilisation, surrounded by three generations whose inevitable presence is more painful than her sufferings; while the father in another corner of the sordid chamber lies stricken with typhus. . . . Contiguous to the door might be observed the dung-heap. . . ."

A corrupt system had been in force whereby workers were indirectly obliged to buy food, clothes and other necessities from middlemen representing their employers. Wages were paid at one, three, or even six-monthly intervals, by which time the worker's indebtedness for food and clothes far outweighed whatever was due to him. At the end of a period of work, he found that *he owed his employer* so much that he must either bind himself for a further term, or else go to prison for debt. This result was largely due to grossly excessive prices having been charged him.

While this system remained in force, workmen, and often their wives and tiny children, were enslaved to employers, sometimes for life.

Consequently, the country was in a constant state of turmoil. In 1844 40,000 miners went on strike for 1844 eighteen weeks in the north of England. Such was the poverty of the country, that they were mostly replaced with new men who were starving, and willing to work under any terms that gave them a little food.

Twenty years later 60,000 men were " out " for nearly four months in Staffordshire and Yorkshire. In 1859, 25,000 building operatives went on strike for over six months.

1852 Thirteen thousand Lancashire engineers and shipbuilders were locked out in 1852 because they objected to a terrible system of unpaid overtime. They were kept out of work for nine months, and were completely beaten. Twenty-five years later 25,000 shipbuilders on the Clyde struck for six months.

These cold figures convey no idea of the agonies of starvation the strikes caused. Yet the stubborn will of a free people had been aroused ; miners, shipyard men, builders, cotton operatives and the rest preferred to go hungry, and even to see their wives and babies weeping for lack of bread rather than submit to the manifold injustices of what was, in effect, slave labour.

Efforts were made ceaselessly to change the unfair conditions by arbitration between employers and employed.

At first the workmen went humbly, cap in hand, to ask for fairer treatment. They were received with contempt and their requests were laughed at. A new and sullen temper spread among them. They talked of force. They refused to work under conditions which dissatisfied them. But the country which had freed black slaves would not free its white ones. Troops were called in to overawe all who dared to rebel ; savage reprisals were levelled at strikers and those who incited them to strike for freedom ; pitched battles took place in which the rifles and sabres of the military were turned against the upraised fists of the men, and the upflung hands of the women and children.

There were periods during the first half of the nineteenth century when the virus that had caused the bloody outbreaks of the French Revolution crept abroad in England. It was checked by the stolid common sense of the British character, not by any concessions or understanding on the part of the ruling classes of those days.

Luckily for our country, the people soon realised that strikes, however violent, would bring them no more reforms than mere requests would do. There remained Parliament; but what hope had working men of fighting a way into Parliament?

In 1869 a few dreamers formed the Labour Representation League. It claimed:

> "Our object is to promote throughout the kingdom the registration of working men's votes without reference to their opinions or party bias; its aim being to organise fully the strength of the operative classes as an electoral power, so that, when necessary, it may be brought to bear, with effect, on any important political, social or industrial question in the issue of which their interests are involved. Its principal duty will be to secure the return to Parliament of qualified working men: persons who, by character and ability, command the confidence of their class, and who are competent to deal satisfactorily with questions of general interest, as well as those in which they are specially interested." 1869

This resolution, passed the same year that I was born, was received throughout the length and breadth of Britain with a shout of gargantuan laughter. Working men in Parliament, forsooth! What would the absurd fellows think of next?

Yet, less than a year later, the very first real Labour candidate in our history fought a by-election in Southwark. George Odger, shoemaker, beat the Liberal candidate, and only just went down to the Tory.

At the next General Election, in 1874, twelve Labour candidates were offered to the electorate by the Labour Representation League. When the bitter election campaigns were done, and the polling was over, England awoke to an amazing fact.

Two Labour representatives had been returned to the Mother of Parliaments!

Thomas Burt and Alexander Macdonald, the forlorn hope of the mighty army of British workers, flung open the gates of St. Stephen's; and those gates have never been quite shut against us since. The fight to force a way through them has been long and hard. Burt and Macdonald died with the issue still unsure; but the torch they lighted was passed on by them before they fell, and I had the honour to march with those who carried it to its first conclusive victory when a Labour Government tramped triumphantly through those same gates in 1924.

It is of the campaign that led to that victory, the defeats and successes, the failures and encouragements, the changing personalities of the leaders and the changeless determination and courage of the rank and file between 1869 and 1924, that I propose to write in this initial volume of my memoirs.

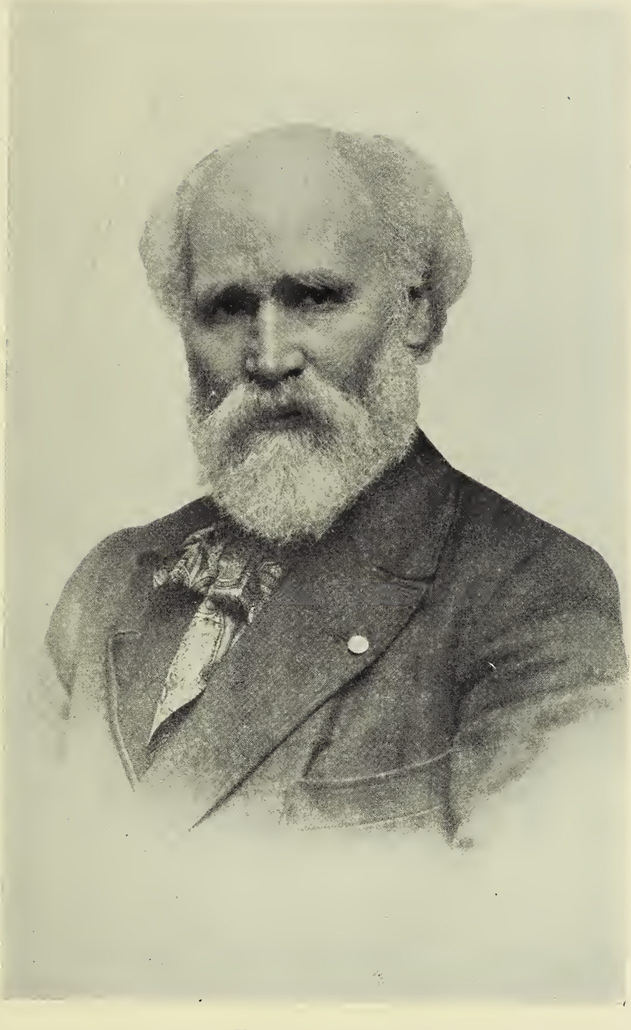
From the first, far-sighted Liberals saw in Labour Parliamentary representation that little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, that would presently spread and obscure the sunlight from the Liberal Party, perhaps for ever.

Ceaseless efforts were made to induce Macdonald and Burt to join the Liberal Party. A so-called Liberal-Labour division was made within the Liberal Party itself, to absorb the new-comers. By 1892 Burt held office under the Liberal Party.

Meanwhile a new figure had won to Westminster who was to make a great name later as the father of Parliamentary Labour.

1888 In 1888 Keir Hardie contested the Mid-Lanark by-election, standing as a Labour candidate in opposition to both Tory and Liberal rivals. He need not have done so. The Liberals were anxious to run him as their own candidate.

When he refused it was stated that a distinguished Liberal called on him, offered him a safe seat elsewhere



KEIR HARDIE

within the Party, and guaranteed him all election expenses and £300 a year so long as he remained a Liberal. The offer would have tempted any man; and one does not doubt that it was made skilfully, accompanied by many arguments showing how futile one Labour M.P. would be at Westminster, and what opportunities there a young favourite of the Liberals would have to put over the very reforms he sought to introduce.

Hardie refused; and was soundly beaten at the election in consequence.

In 1892 he was elected as a member for West Ham. 1892 The world of politics stood aghast. It had supposed that this presumptuous fellow had learned his lesson in Lanarkshire. Instead, he went on to revolutionise Parliament.

Keir Hardie was born in a single-roomed cottage on a Lanarkshire coalfield, and was one of nine children and two adults to inhabit that single room. Schooling could not be afforded in such a family, but his mother taught him to read. At six years old he was working for his living, and was temporarily the only breadwinner in the family! He earned four shillings and sixpence a week. At nights he nursed a brother ill with fever. This made him twice late for work in the mornings; on the second occasion he was dismissed, forfeiting a fortnight's wages.

At nine years old he was working twelve hours a day in a Lanarkshire coal mine. Ten years later he could speak French and a little Latin; he had educated himself.

In 1888 he was appointed as the first secretary of the Scottish Labour Party, which he was largely responsible for forming. Four years later he became an M.P., soundly beating a Tory opponent.

For many years, mocked by the parasites he threatened, doubted by the workers he wished to help, flayed by the Press, excommunicated by the society church, feared by his contemporaries in the House, shunned by all who wished to remain respectable, this remarkable man went up and down Great Britain, fanning the Labour smoulderings to flame.

1894 One day, in June, 1894, in the Commons, an address of congratulation was moved on the birth of a son to the then Duchess of York. This child later became King Edward VIII. Hardie moved an amendment to this address, crying out that over two hundred and fifty men and boys had been killed on the same day in a mining disaster, and claiming that this great tragedy needed the attention of the House far more than the birth of any baby. He had been a miner himself; he knew.

The House rose at him like a pack of wild dogs. His voice was drowned in a din of insults and the drumming of feet on the floor. But he stood there, white-faced, blazing-eyed, his lips moving, though the words were swept away.

Later he wrote:

> " The life of one Welsh miner is of greater commercial and moral value to the British nation than the whole Royal crowd put together, from the Royal Grandmamma down to this puling Royal Great-grandchild."

He lost his seat at the next General Election for that! In a by-election the following year the opinion of his enemies was further endorsed. But he was back again at Westminster in 1900, as formidable as ever.

Before that, at Glasgow, he and Lloyd George spoke side by side on the uselessness of war, save as a profit-making ramp for capitalists. The Boer War was already threatened; the country had been flooded, as always, with preliminary propaganda, and both speakers had a narrow escape from losing their lives. Curious how, in 1914, the two men came to the parting of the ways! But it was not Hardie who recanted.

Of his later life in Parliament how he fathered and guided us till there was a *real* Parliamentary Labour Party in existence, how he restrained the hot-heads and whipped on the laggards, how his wisdom shaped the Labour Representation Committee, and his courage burned like a white light to guide its members during their wanderings through the wilderness of failure and difficulty in the pre-war years, I shall tell more fully later in this book.

When he was an old man he saw, in 1914, the thing he had given his life to prevent, and he was heart-broken. He had believed so absolutely that organised labour the world over would never take part in another orgy of workmen's blood, and when peace fled from Europe Keir Hardie ceased to wish to live. He died, bitterly disappointed, amid the ruins of his life-work ; yet from the war-scarred ashes of those very ruins the Labour giant was reborn, and rose in irresistible power.

Perhaps it is given to James Keir Hardie to know now that Labour is becoming a greater force even than he ever dreamed of ; that it learned from war the lesson it would not learn from him, the fierce prophet of peace ; and that his work goes on and grows in power year by year.

But I am running ahead of my tale. In this chapter I have tried to give some glimpses of the world stage as it was set in the middle of the last century ; of the problems that faced all who worked, and of the dreams they dreamed of tackling those problems. The backcloth to the stage was dark and lurid ; before it stood the stately homes of England in all their peace and beauty ; in the foreground were belching factories, slag-surrounded mines and grim mills, in which millions of bent-backed, ant-like figures ran to and fro, dutifully making the money by which the stately homes were financed, earning for themselves only coarse bread and the uncertain right to exist in squalor, knuckling foreheads obediently . . . and yet, ever and again, one of them, pausing for a moment, darkling and uncertain, staring up between courage and unbelief, at the writing forming in letters of fire on the wall.

On this stage, in the inconspicuous corner where Oldham stands, amidst a great fever of mill work, surrounded by poverty and disease, malnutrition and 1875 ignorance, a small boy, sullenly eager to escape from the brutal slavery of school to the merciless thraldom of the mill, was very anxious to quiet the rumblings of an empty belly by contributing to the home exchequer the few shillings a week that a " little Piecer " could earn.

1875 Myself !

Chapter II

1875–1885—My early years—School days—Working as a piecer—Day-dreams—Learning words from a dictionary—Teaching myself grammar—My three blind fates—A book that shaped my life—Practising oratory in a disused quarry—Letters to the Editor.

If I may perpetrate an Erse joke, I can claim to be half Irish and wholly Lancastrian.

My father, Patrick Clynes, was a thoroughgoing Irishman, and from him I inherited hair which the cartoonists always portray as uncompromisingly upright as the hackles of an Irish terrier. From him, also, I may have gained an hereditary determination to fight against unfair social conditions ; for he suffered cruelly through them.

1851 In 1851, when he was a quiet farm worker in Ireland, a Parliamentary Act which he did not understand was passed, like a divine decree, and Patrick Clynes, with hundreds of others, suffered the cruelties of eviction, and was left to find a new way of living. He could not find it in Ireland ; but the cotton boom in Lancashire was attracting thousands of machine-minders, and he went to Oldham, where for a time he worked in a mill.

A depression period threw him out of employment. He obtained a job as a labourer for the Oldham Corporation at a salary of a pound a week. He spent his life working for Oldham, helping to lay out the New Park ; and in exchange for his life he received a wage which never rose above twenty-four shillings a week. He worked hard, seldom for less than ten hours a day, often for twelve ; he had no holidays ; when he was not working his only desire was for rest or sleep.

Fine worker though he was, he never learned to read or write. Such luxuries were expensive when I was a child, and prohibitive in his own young days.

Yet he was a courteous, grave man, wise though not learned, and he and my mother taught me the essentials of knowledge. Two sisters by their great helpfulness increased my chances. My schoolmaster taught me nothing except a fear of birching and a hatred of formal education.

My father, from his twenty-four shillings, paid a penny or two a week each for myself and my brother and five sisters, so that we should receive the education he had missed.

My school days have no pleasant memories. When I was not in school trying to avoid notice and beatings, I
1875 was at home in a tiny farmhouse on the outskirts of Oldham. I remember no golden summers, no triumphs at games and sports, no birds'-nesting, no tramps through dark woods or over shadow-racing hills. Only meals at which there never seemed to be enough food, dreary journeys through smoke-fouled streets, in mornings when I nodded with tiredness and in evenings when my legs trembled under me from exhaustion.

I was a small, spindly, white-faced boy, and I had none of childhood's dreams. When I thought of anything beyond hunger, fatigue and the winter cold that pricked the very bones of my fingers and toes, my mind revolved with dreary ambition around my next step in life. When I achieved the manly age of ten I could—if I were lucky—obtain half-time employment in one of the great cotton mills, whose grim chimneys darkened the sky.

I knew other lads, a year or two older than myself—sunken-eyed waifs—who had already graduated into brave industry. At least, they had finished with school; at least, they were being paid real money each Saturday, and their parents left them a penny or two of it each week with which they could buy things really for themselves.

My own tenth birthday came at last. Through the help of my father I managed to obtain half-time employment at the Dowry Mill as a "little piecer." My hours were from six in the morning each day to noon; then a brief time off for dinner; then on to school for the afternoons; and I was to receive half a crown a week in return. 1879

As conditions were then I was counted lucky.

For the first time I began to think my lack of inches an advantage. The smaller a piecer was the better for him as he ran to and fro between gliding masses of machinery, whose arms reached avariciously out for him and then withdrew gloatingly from him, like the claws of a gigantic mechanical cat playing with a mouse.

Within a few minutes of passing for the first time through the jenny-gate of Dowry Mill (I have wondered often since whose dowry it provided!) I was introduced to the machines among which I expected to spend the rest of my life.

The noise was what impressed me most. Clatter, rattle, bang, the swish of thrusting levers and the crowding of hundreds of men, women and children at their work. Long rows of huge spinning-frames, with thousands of whirling spindles, slid forward several feet, paused and then slid smoothly back again, continuing this process unceasingly hour after hour while cotton became yarn and yarn changed to weaving material.

Often the threads on the spindles broke as they were stretched and twisted and spun. These broken ends had to be instantly repaired; the piecer ran forward and joined them swiftly, with a deft touch that is an art of its own.

That was my job. I performed it, unresting, in my bare feet, since leather on those oil-soaked floors would have been treacherous. Often I fell, rolling instinctively and in terror from beneath the gliding jennies, well aware that horrible mutilation or death would result if the advancing monsters overtook and gripped me. Sometimes splinters as keen as daggers drove through my naked feet, leaving aching wounds from which dribbles of blood oozed forth to add to the slipperiness of the floor. I just had to try to avoid the splinters and the falls ; there were few chances to tear the jagged bits of wood away while those unprotected machines were on the move.

Running in and out, straining my eyes in the gas-lit gloom to watch for broken threads, my ten-year-old legs 1879 soon felt like lead and my head spun faster than the pitiless machinery. But I had to keep on ; the dinner-whistle would shrill some time soon ; then I could rest my aches and regain my breath, ready to run two miles home to dinner, and then set off for school.

A merciful Act of Parliament (or at least it was merciful by comparison with its predecessors, and many mill-owners considered it pampering) had been passed not so long before, ruling that children should not be employed for more than ten working hours a day, and that they should not be made to work all through the night, as had formerly been the case. As I pounded breathlessly to and fro between the rows of machines, ever gliding towards one another and then away like gigantic skeletons performing some crazy minuet, and as my aching fingers pieced up the broken ends of cotton I thought how lucky I was to have been born in a humane era, and how much more dreadful must have been the conditions of child labour when my father was a boy.

And heaven knows they were !

School somehow seemed less terrifying and revolting once I had become a half-timer in the mill. I had some respite from canings, and from the everlasting pressure that education seemed to exert to prevent me from thinking for myself. I still ground out passages learned by heart for three days a week, but, during the working days among the machinery, no one could stop my thoughts from roving.

They went to queer places. Just as a dragon-fly in its chrysalis may dream of formless glories through summer days a-wing, so the hungry piecer who had never ventured beyond the murk of Oldham pictured sunlit valleys drowsing, and peopled them from the fairy realms of poetry. When we had been set poetry to learn at school I had furtively read on and on, avidly anxious for more, careless of punishments earned because I refused the drudgery of repeating one passage or another till it became a mere meaningless chant.

Somewhere in my schooling I had chanced upon that strange truth expressed in *Twelfth Night* :

> " Be not afraid of greatness ; some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them . . ."

" Be not afraid of greatness ! " What a creed ! How it would upset the world if men lived up to it, I thought. I often puzzled over it ; little dreaming then that a certain fame would come to me, also, in my turn.

One morning, as I ran to and fro attending the machines, some lines of Milton that I had read and half learned long before, because I loved them, swept dazzling into my mind : 1880

> " And now
> Advanced in view they stand ; a horrid front
> Of dreadful length and dazzling arms, in guise
> Of warriors old with ordered spear and shield ;
> Awaiting what command their mighty chief
> Had to impose ; he through the armed files
> Darts his experienced eye, and soon traverse
> The whole battalion views . . ."

I stood there, transfixed and dazed, while the " horrid front of dreadful length and dazzling arms " swept forward at me, and only just in time did I skip swiftly back out of reach.

After that the machinery had a different meaning for me ; dimly I perceived the ordained perfection of its sweetly-running, magnificent rhythm, and forgot my aches and discontents in something akin to the perfect mathematical joy of the engineer.

Often as I worked I used to repeat appropriate passages of poetry in time with the glide and thrust of the jennies. Had anyone heard me I should have been thought mad ; but the everlasting noise was my safeguard, and my small voice was swept away.

By this time my brother and sisters were becoming a serious drain on our combined resources. My father and I earned less than thirty shillings a week between us ; and our total wages were not very much on which to pay rent, buy clothes and feed the family.

Our food was bread, with butter when we could afford it, and lard or dripping when we could not ; stews composed of vegetables and unwanted ends of meat ; peas and beans, which filled us well and did not cost very much ; and tea when we were lucky. Nothing else.

Later, when I was Food Controller of Great Britain, I used often to think of those childish days, and wonder whether the little red and blue coupons my department issued were of much use to families such as mine had been—if any still existed by that time. Alas ! I fear that some such may still be found even to-day.

1881 Twelve years old ! Freed from the thraldom of schooling at last, and ready to go forth, a grown man into the world of work. Able to earn ten shillings a week now, and dream daringly of surpassing my father's income some day, if I kept earnestly at my job. A full-time piecer.

Even now I am not quite clear how I first came to realise that the lovely passages of poetry which had mixed themselves up in my work at the mill were no more than messengers from a land of fairy beauty to which I could escape whenever I pleased when Oldham grew too grim and grey. I could already read and write in simple words. All I had to do was to become familiar with other words, and then buy books. I might be enchained to Oldham industry all my life, but through books I could hunt the African forests, roam the sunlit Californian hill-tops, and sail the Seven Seas.

I was a little awed at first by my own daring. Yet Shakespeare had said : " Be not afraid of greatness." I took him at his word.

There were no daily newspapers then of the popular type we have now. Those papers that did exist were meant for educated people—people with leisure. There were no cheap books ; and indeed very few books at all on popular subjects. There were classics, and learned tomes of other types ; but cotton-piecers did not read either kind. There was no wireless ; no bicycles ; no cars ; no speedy communication save by railway, which, again, was hardly ever used by working people, save in a few cases to carry them to and from their work.

Millions of men and women died in their own towns and villages without ever having travelled five miles from the spot where they were born. To them the rest of the world was a shadowy place merging into the boundaries of unreality.

I can perhaps give some idea of this state of things when I tell you that old cotton-spinners in Oldham, when I was a lad, used to debate with intense gravity on the destination of the tons of cotton the mills turned out, and lived in permanent fear lest the world should be overloaded with cotton goods and all the mills suddenly have to close down.

That world was hardly one in which a twelve-year-old boy, whose earnings were swallowed up in the family exchequer, would find it easy to acquire a library of his own ; and, of course, there were no public ones in those days. 1881

I was drawn to the bookshops. Eventually, in a back street, I found what I needed—a tattered and dog-eared old dictionary for sale. After walking up and down outside for a bit in an agony of shyness I burst into the shop and asked the price of it.

" Oh, that ? " said the shopman, laughing down at me. " You can have that for sixpence, my lad. Nobody wants dictionaries here."

It cost me the whole of two weeks' personal pocket money to accumulate the sixpence. I had meant to wait three weeks, but the thought that only a little extra self-denial stood between me and my quarry decided me, and so I cut short the delay by a whole week, and placed in my pocket the key that was to unlock the treasure-houses of the world for me.

How I pored over that dictionary! I was up at 4.30 in the mornings, winter or summer alike, in their smoke-pall and discomfort, and I was not back from the mill till after six in the evenings. After tea I sat down to my dictionary.

At first the shouts of my brother and sisters disturbed the painful concentration I required, and their toys or their hurtling bodies hit me or my table with devastating effect. But, as the evening drew on, I forgot my surroundings and myself.

I skipped all the ordinary words. The rest I wrote down and repeated over and over again, syllable by syllable. I worked through the dictionary for months, from A to Zymic. Some of the words I loved, and these I wrote down far more often than I need have done, because of the pleasure they were to the eye, and the caress of the syllables to the ear. Each time the roll and rush of them delighted me more.

Merely words, and the beautiful sound of the best of them; the swinging rhythm of perfectly-balanced sentences that grew out of them; the emotions they could call forth—it was with these intangible playthings that I spent my evenings during one of the happiest periods of my life. My days at the mill seemed dreams; only the evenings were real.

1881 I became like a character from an old romance, my body walking and talking by day, but my soul coming to life only at nights under the potency of the magic words I culled from my sixpenny dictionary.

I have that dictionary to this day; I still look upon it as the foundation-stone of my fortunes.

Candles cost me threepence or more each week. I had to work by candlelight, of course, except in high summer. A copy of Cobbett's *Grammar* was eightpence; that taught me how to put my word-puzzles together.

But my education had been too slender for me to go forward alone on the road of literature. I stumbled too often ; my impatience became too great to be borne ; I must find a guide on that rocky highway. And since a teacher would require paying, I must find spare-time work after my long days at the mill were finished.

The gods help those who help themselves, so the old Greeks used to say. Undoubtedly the gods helped me. For at this critical period I heard of three old blind men who would pay threepence a week between them to anyone who would read the weekly paper to them. Reading was not such a common ability ; perhaps I should get the job.

In fear, I went to apply for it. In their stuffy, dusty room in an Oldham cottage, I gave them a trial reading. They listened critically, sightless eyes staring at me, keen ears judging. 1882

" You'll do," announced the eldest briefly, when I had finished.

Reading aloud was a new joy to me. Some of the articles I read from the local Oldham papers of the time must have been pretty poor stuff I suppose, but they went to my head like wine. I tried to stress the right syllables and put in the light and shade, the pauses and the quickening that the authors of those articles had intended.

Often, when I had concluded an article, one or other of my listeners would ask me to read certain passages over again. I used to watch those old men dwelling with joy on the more perfect phrases. Their lips moved silently as they shaped at something that only their inner vision could see.

Then I began to feel the power of words ; that strange magic which can excite multitudes to glory, sacrifice or shame. As blindly as my blind hearers, I began to conceive that these words that I loved were more than pretty playthings : they were mighty levers whereby the power of the whole world could be more evenly and fairly distributed for the benefit of my kind.

The men to whom I read fed my vague fancies. They would argue fiercely on political problems, thumping sticks on the bare floor till the lamp by which I read choked and went out, and I sat there for long periods in the darkness of which they were so unaware, wondering if all they said could be true, and that those who worked in the world were really entitled to leisure, good food and happiness.

They sowed the seeds of my political beliefs, those old men.

They did more! Their threepence a week, plus fivepence from my wages at the mill, paid the fees of an ex-schoolmaster who held classes two nights a week, at which I gained a working knowledge of how to read and what to study.

I wanted more books, hungrily. But I could not afford them. So I haunted the second-hand bookstalls in all the hours I could spare. I must have become a very familiar figure there; a rather shy, under-developed lad, poring endlessly over volumes that I put down reluctantly just before closing time.

In this way, by stolen snatches, I read very much
1882 of Emerson's *Essays* and Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture*.

I would have read anything from a cookery book to the *Decline and Fall*. As a matter of fact, the Ruskin thrilled me deeply, probably because of its noble prose.

Later on, when I could afford to buy the book, I asked the shopman whether he ever felt restless when watching me reading so frequently there, and knowing that I was not then purchasing any books.

"Lord bless you, I don't mind!" he laughed. "We know when people start reading like that they buy in the end. Same as a fish nibbling; once let it get a taste of the bait and it can't leave it alone till it is on the hook."

I don't know how true that remark was of fishing, but it was true enough of literature in my case.

Presently, I bought a book by John Stuart Mill. Then I could afford a copy of Carlyle's work.

One day, important with the knowledge that I had saved—no matter how painfully—a whole shilling, I anxiously turned the books on the stall to find something useful—and beautiful. There, under my hand, lay a book which I opened with some uncertainty.

The book was Renan's *Life of Jesus.*

On the page so casually turned, my eye alighted on a phrase of perfect beauty. I forget now what it was ; I have underlined hundreds of them since, so that there is scarcely anywhere in the book that does not bear some mark showing where I have dwelt on it and gathered comfort from it often in times of perplexity or disappointment.

Turning the pages swiftly, and then slower, I forgot the shop, forgot my shilling, and lost myself in the most human and splendid story in the world. I could hardly pause to buy it ; I went home that night with new sentences ringing like clashing bells within my consciousness, and read long after my usual late hour.

That little book has helped to shape my life. Without its quiet strength to aid me I should have gone down underfoot and been trampled into insignificance, and the hurrying march of progress in which I have taken part would have swept on, leaving me crippled and flung aside as it has left so many others who have counted on their own strength to carry them on.

During all this time that I was floundering into knowledge, I was doing my work at the mill steadily if somewhat automatically. I had risen already to the rank of " big piecer," and was earning the magnificent sum of 1883 seventeen shillings and sixpence a week.

For years, ever since I had been nine or ten years old, I had aimed at reaching an eventual wage of thirty shillings—six shillings more than my father earned. But books and papers, and the talk of the old blind men, were making me restless. The actual amount of my wages was becoming a secondary thing ; I wanted not only more luxuries and happiness for myself, but a share of life's rewards for everyone. My ideas were chaotic, as indeed they may well have been since the ambitions they already vaguely envisaged necessitated an earthquake in social conditions.

To relieve my mind, I began daringly to write down on paper the reforms that I thought essential in the mills of Oldham before it could be claimed that the workmen received fair treatment. My outlines were modest in the extreme, but they shocked me so much that I tore up the writing into very small pieces.

I had had some plan forming in me of writing my ideas in letters to the editor of the local paper, and attempting the honour of unpaid publication for them. But seeing them there, written down in my crabbed, painstaking hand, I hastily pushed the revolutionary idea right out of my mind.

I turned back to my books for solace. They helped me to forget my empty stomach and my unquiet spirit.

During this period I became very introspective. I lost real ambition, was content to perform my duties at the mill like one walking in his sleep, ate my scanty meals without much interest, and began to live only in the beauty of masterly prose. Life became a dream, and reading a reality.

I was in a fair way to sinking into a state in which I should have grown up a useful workman with no ideals beyond a wish to read quietly in leisure hours. There are hundreds such ; I have met them up and down England ; and whenever I do so I think that I might have been like that myself, or that the dreamer might have been a Cabinet Minister had events shaped his youth as they shaped mine.

I date the change in myself from a local meeting in
1883 Oldham of a number of young firebrands who claimed to be a branch of the Irish National League. I attended because I was Irish by descent, and because I took every opportunity of hearing public speaking, anxious to garner crumbs of knowledge and to hear the sounding

clash of fine words well wielded. Of course, I had no intention whatever of speaking ; I was far too shy for that !

Orator after orator addressed the tiny gathering—some 1883 of them, I suspect, for the pleasure of hearing their own voices declaiming, and why not ?—but nothing of much importance emerged. And then a big Irish lad, not much older than myself, was on his feet. I sat up in fresh interest. Here was something of a new quality. He attacked the conditions of mill workers in Oldham, shook the owners' rights as a terrier shakes a rat, and flung them contemptuously from him, but not until we all realised that they were dead and that they should never have existed. His creed was a destructive one, and his blarney made it seem to us that destruction was the only effort worth while.

And yet I could detect a fault in it all. My hard-headed Lancastrian strain made me demand construction as well as pulling down. Before I quite realised it I was on my feet and heard my own voice making point after point which the speaker, a lad named Byrne, who had already gained local fame as an orator, had glossed over.

He stared at me, his eyes flaming, and I sat down again somewhat suddenly, expecting to have my objections swept away in a torrent of oratory. His answer astounded me more, I expect, than anyone else in the room.

" Right you are, young fellow ! " he laughed. " I dare say I did let me enthusiasm run away with me a bit. Anyway, you seem to know a bit about our rights yourself, now. Come on up and tell us all *you* think ! "

I was not equal to that. I subsided more completely than if he had dismissed my points with absolute logic.

At the end of the meeting, as I was walking towards the door I felt an arm linked through mine, and flushed with pleasure to see Byrne beside me.

" Sure, now, you should have got up on your hind legs and made us a speech," he said in his soft brogue. " You pulled me up beautifully when I was running away with myself. You and I must have some grand debates. Then you'll be able to do public speaking as you should. You've got the knowledge, Clynes, but I doubt if ever you'll have the real gift o' the gab. You stick to truth so much ; it's a drawback sometimes."

He smiled whimsically, and we strolled on together through the cobbled Oldham streets, dark and twisting and narrow, lighted here and there by flaring gas-jets that flung our grotesque shadows in a wild fandango around our feet.

"I know an old stone quarry outside the town," he said suddenly. "Come there sometimes, on these summer evenings, after you finish at the mill, and we'll stage real debates in deadly earnest. You shall take one side and I the other ; we'll heckle each other and shout and interrupt, and, sure, by the time we can overcome the interruptions and down the hecklers, we'll be able to face any public meeting alive."

And so it was that I gained my very first lessons in public speaking. Byrne and I were contrasts and foils. He was a wild, gifted Irish orator, silvery of tongue, quick as forked lightning to strike at the weak point in an opponent's argument, lulling as a summer breeze to glide over dangerous ground, able to tighten the throat in emotion or loosen it in laughter, elusive in escape, irresistible in pursuit. I developed my natural style, partly in sheer opposition to him, so that I spoke slowly and unemotionally, using what pawky Lancastrian humour I could muster as dryly as I could, relying for effect on sheer weight of incontrovertible fact, starting perhaps unimpressively in order to work up to an inevitable climax, steady under cross-questions, never avoiding conflict and worrying out my points by persistence and obstinate determination not to be turned aside.

I smile sometimes now when I think of those stirring
1884 debates we had in the old stone quarry, in the summer evenings when noiseless bats flittered and the stains of glory died from the western sky, often leaving us in the

quarry bottom in pools of inky darkness, from which our voices thundered and declaimed passages as extravagant and promises as wild as any ever heard at the hustings of a General Election.

By thus putting my thoughts into words, and having to defend them against merciless attack, I became more sure of what I really did believe. I formulated revolutionary ideas about the rights of workmen to live comfortably and laugh often. I determined that they were entitled to good food, decent clothes, houses instead of hovels, the right to work where they chose, and to be consulted before changes were made in their hours or wages.

How they were to attain to all these ideal conditions I then had no idea. There was no such thing as Labour representation, save in the most elementary forms in the germs of Unions; as for Parliamentary representation, that was the prerogative of the masters, and the men were not expected to lift their eyes to such heights.

But Byrne and I thrashed out the rights of man, and a good number of other and even more abstruse subjects, with all the intolerance and self-assurance of seventeen-year-olds. This splendid fellow remained my friend to the end.

Clynes was hewn as surely in that old quarry as the stone that lay, grass-grown, about our feet. Shakespeare says: "There is a divinity that shapes our ends," and the power was at work on me during those summer evenings, chipping here, smoothing there, and hardening the whole to stand the wear of a stormy life of political stress.

One night, as we walked homewards after our debate 1885
had finished, I mentioned shyly to Byrne that abandoned ambition of mine to write letters on the subject of mill life and conditions to local newspapers. He stopped in his tracks.

"Why, write them then!" he exclaimed vehemently. "Write them. The pen is mightier than the word. Your cold style would be the very thing—it would be more telling on paper than in debate, I dare say, though it's good enough there. Write one to-night, and we'll see it in print in no time."

That night, late as it was when I got home, I sat in the silent house and wrote the first of a series of letters that were to take me a long step farther towards Downing Street. The subject of the letter was the conditions of child labour in the mills, and I made some suggestions which seemed to me fair proposals for improvements.

1885 Having finished the letter, I sat staring at it, the candle guttering in the draught from the open window. I could not sign it with my own name, or I should certainly lose my employment at the mill. Mill owners did not want hands who thought for themselves, much less ones who were out to make trouble by attempting to better the conditions of their fellows.

I had to find a pseudonym. I turned over the thought slowly in my mind, and rejected various possibilities. In want of a better pen-name, and very dissatisfied with my choice, which I intended to be a temporary one, I wrote "Piecer" at the end of the letter, and allowed myself a mild flourish after the word.

Thus began the famous series of "Piecer" letters which were later to cause much discussion in Lancashire, and to bring me, a cotton worker, eventually to the presidency of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers, in which cotton interests are not largely represented.

Chapter III

1885–1888—Going through the mill—The "Piecer" Letters—I go on strike alone—Forming a Piecers' Union—Public speaking—Books that helped me—Meeting my wife—Strikes and hunger-marches—The Leeds Bridge battle—Ben Tillett—Burns and Mann—William Morris and G. B. Shaw.

When I was a young man the term "To have been through the mill" had a grim meaning. We accept it now as a slang addition to the English language, indicating a knocked-about and hard-worn appearance. In 1890 it described a mill worker whose childhood had been ruined by hard labour and little sleep, and who, in manhood, looked shrunken and white-faced.

My "Piecer" letters were inspired by the sight of hundreds of men and women around me who bore the marks of having "been through the mill." 1885

In the friendly columns of a local paper I wrote reasoned protests against conditions which squeezed the life-blood from thousands in order to make fortunes for the few.

I knew my subject at first-hand. I could write feelingly of getting up at about four o'clock each morning, bolting a few mouthfuls of unnourishing food, and then setting out, fists in eyes to keep them open, to trudge three miles through the stone forest of Oldham's pitch-black, unlighted streets to the mill. There were no buses or trams, nor could we have afforded them. I could describe mills in which daylight was so rare a thing that gas-jets sputtered steadily all day, and the heat was so sickening that men worked stripped to the waist. For months at a time, during winter, thousands of mill workers never saw daylight except on Sunday—appropriate name! While they worked, the gas lighted them, and their walks to and from the mills were cloaked in the murky Oldham night.

I never lacked for burning inspiration for those letters. It murmured to me in the gleaming, unguarded machinery which stretched out greedy arms to grip man, woman or child. It rose from the sullen mutterings of workers who saw one of their number terribly injured, and knew that his wife—or perhaps his widow—could not demand compensation. It cried out in the whimper of children weeping with tiredness at the end—or even at the beginning—of a working day.

1885 To my own surprise my letters were printed with increasing regularity. After a while editorials appeared, drawing attention to the "Piecer" correspondence, and often whole-heartedly endorsing it with the weight of the newspaper's influence.

Those were great days for me. If one newspaper could be interested so could others. If the Press would champion the cause of the oppressed, conditions might be changed. The Trade Unions, then looked upon generally as malignant secret societies, might some day attain power in the land, and demand fair treatment for workers who were being victimised by bitter injustices.

Would it be too much to hope that some day even Parliament might listen to the clarion voice of Labour?

In one of my letters I wrote:

> "We scarcely know what might now be the position of the ordinary worker, were it not for the increasing exertions of our growing trade unions. But the times have changed, and the old weapons will not do for the new battle. If the workers want different laws the workers also want different law-makers. Some say the workers must make the adoption of their programme the point on which future elections must turn; but instead of forcing others to adopt their programme *it would be better for the workers to elect their own members to carry their programme out.*"

Revolutionary stuff indeed in those days! I did not lack opposition both in and out of print. Much of it came from the very men who should have supported the programme I outlined. Old cotton operatives of every grade poured scorn on the idea that Labour would ever be represented in Parliament by real labouring men.

One of the questions on which I was most outspoken in my letters was that of the employment of girls and women in the mills. Much of the work they were then required to do was far too heavy for them. I am no opponent of female employment, but I have always refused to envisage women as successful navvies!

In advocating wider universal education, too, I received much bitter opposition. Elderly spinners claimed bitterly that "learning" only made the youngsters discontented, and taught them to cry for the moon. "What was good enough for me ought to be good enough for my children" was the basis of their belief.

The mill owners, too, threw their weight solidly against the unsettling influence of education. They wanted steady workers; it did not suit their ends that the workers should know too much.

One day, when I was working in the mill, a slack five minutes gave me the opportunity to draw from my pocket a thumbed and dirty copy of *Paradise Lost*. I had hardly opened it when a shadow fell across the pages. 1886

"What's tha-at?" asked the foreman.

I handed him the book, and he stared at it uncomprehendingly. As a matter of fact, he could hardly read.

"Books!" he exclaimed contemptuously. "What the 'ell dost tha want wi' books? Books'll never buy thee britches!"

He watched me narrowly after that, and I had to be careful to keep the book in my pocket, or I should have found myself out of a job.

Because of my political leanings, I held my modest job in an uneasy tenure. On more than one occasion I ran unpleasantly against the very forces at whose injustice I so passionately railed.

Piecers, at that time, were paid a fixed weekly wage for a six-day week of practically twelve-hour days. In addition, they were expected to be on duty for several hours each week for which they received no pay whatever.

The official hour of starting was 6 a.m. But before that great machines had to be cleaned and oiled, and a certain amount of preparatory work done. The same processes were repeated during the breakfast half-hour, and during the dinner-hour.

I have always opposed strikes unless all other efforts had failed, but the unfairness of these hours of unpaid work rankled so that I was driven to desperation. Half a dozen piecers in the same room as myself felt as I did. We were prepared to do compulsory extra work, but only if we received money for it, whereas the benefit from this unpaid work went solely to the spinners. Finally, after much angry talk, we agreed to resist by refusing to appear at the mill till the official hour of starting.

1886 On the day chosen for the commencement of our revolt my companions weakened, and, under the whip of fear, they turned up at their usual time. When I walked into the room precisely on the minute at which I was paid to appear there, they looked anywhere but at me ; and I knew that trouble lay ahead for me.

I was sent for at once, and the foreman asked me why I had absented myself when I should have been cleaning and oiling machinery. I felt very much afraid, but I explained my views uncompromisingly to him.

" Do you realise that this may mean your dismissal ? " he asked, when I had done.

I nodded miserably, but would not budge my position.

The foreman, an old Lancastrian with a mordant humour, laughed suddenly.

" Lads like you will change things in the mills some day," he said, sourly. " All the better for cotton. No use my trying to stop progress. Well—the other lads don't seem to hold your views, so they can share your oiling between 'em."

I went back to my work with a bounding heart. I had won my first little fight for fair conditions. After that, I was privileged to arrive at the official time, and my companions had the mortification of working many hours longer than I, for the same wages.

That, however, was by no means all I sought. I wanted better conditions, not for myself only, but for piecers in general. So I set to work to agitate for the formation of a separate Piecers' Union.

At the time, thousands of piecers all over Lancashire paid a membership subscription to the Spinners' Union. As piecers were nearly always boys and young men who became spinners themselves in their later years, they had no direct representation as piecers in controlling the affairs of the Union. Union officials were older men, anxious to improve working conditions for spinners, but not always exempt from the feeling that it did the lads good to "go through the mill" as their fathers had done before them.

Consequently the piecers' subscription was little more than a limited form of insurance. Like all other piecers, I felt that we were entitled to act independently of the spinners, though not in any way in opposition to them.

A piecers' meeting was called, and I was asked to speak. 1886
The practice I had been gaining so persistently in my twilight debates now bore fruit. As a result of our efforts in the quarry I had very little to fear on a public platform.

The meeting was held late one night at Bolton. The journey there alone was somewhat of an adventure for me. The room was crowded with collarless men, determined that conditions for piecers must be improved.

When my turn came to speak the chairman put a hand on my shoulder.

"This, laads, is Piecer Clynes, who writes all the newspaper articles about us!"

I had no idea that the " Piecer " letters were so widely read, and the warmth of the greeting I received took my breath away. But I soon got it back, and went steadily and carefully over the ground I had prepared.

There was no doubt that my hearers were in full agreement with what I said. One or two questions were asked, and everyone seemed pleased.

Before that meeting broke up it was decided that a separate Piecers' Union should be formed. I left Bolton that night so late that it was almost time to get up and start for the mill again, but I felt a sense of real triumph for the first time in my life, and glimpsed far ahead the shapes of fantastic things to come, both for the lower-paid men in the cotton industry and for myself.

1886 When I got home I was eagerly asked for details about the meeting. I gave them.

" Well done, lad," they laughed. " We shall see our Jack on the Town Council some day, at this rate ! "

That would have been the moment, had we lived in Greek legend instead of in Oldham, for Mercury to appear, accompanied by a clap of thunder, and to say dramatically : " He shall be, not Town Councillor, but His Majesty's Secretary of State for Home Affairs ! " Had he done so, however, I do not think any of us would have believed him.

As a humble first step the Piecers' Union was actually formed. My " spare " time became even busier than before. I had to answer letters, convene gatherings, and agitate first for a stronger membership and second for adequate representation in our struggle to obtain better conditions from employers.

The Piecers' Union, so precariously born, struggled on through a few years of uneasy existence, but now it has passed out of sight again. We were handicapped from the first because the Spinners' Union naturally wished to keep the piecers within its own ranks, and because, in the nature of things, piecers do not remain in that employment long enough to bring age and experience to the aid of their Union, normally becoming spinners themselves before middle life.

During my efforts to found the new Union, I never ceased my private endeavours to widen my own limited education.

I wanted to find out where cotton came from, and where the goods went to after they left Oldham. I felt an unutterable craving for fine music which I had exceedingly little opportunity to satisfy. Baths as we know them to-day did not exist; to keep clean one had to swim. I do not mind admitting that I learned to swim in a local mill-pond, and learned to run fast when given practice by the policeman, who always conscientiously chased us out of it.

Such books as I could afford influenced me deeply. I saw recently that a new edition of John Mitchell's *Jail Journal* was to be published, and it reminded me sharply that I have never seen a copy of that book other than my own. I bought my copy in an Oldham junk-shop in 1888, and the author's patriotism, courage and loyalty to his country affected my feelings in a way I have not yet forgotten.

But books of my own were rare luxuries. Most of my 1886 reading was done in the Oldham Equitable Co-operative Society's library. I remember sitting there night after night, watching men and boys reading the employment advertisements, reading them till the type stupefied the eye, and then sighing and shuffling down the steps into the grimy street outside.

I sat at the table reading Shakespeare, Ruskin and Dickens, or whatever else I could get hold of. I remember my discovery of *Julius Cæsar*, and how the realisation came suddenly to me that it was a mighty political drama, not just an entertainment.

The haughty Tribune who reproved the mechanics for daring to walk abroad on a labouring day "without the sign of their profession" was typical of many who sat on the benches of the House of Commons in my boyhood; and men of like spirit sit there yet.

The old librarian of the Society's library took a kindly interest in me. Often he would hobble across to where I sat and look over my shoulder.

" Shakespeare ! " he would murmur in satisfaction. " Stick to Shakespeare and the Bible. They're the roots of civilisation."

On that library wall to-day hangs a painting of my old librarian friend, with a portrait of myself facing it.

In that drab reading-room, history became real to me, and its characters changed from dusty puppets into men and women, fanatics and patriots, many of whom had died for their beliefs. Wat Tyler and Jack Cade seemed heroes.

Geography, hitherto a mysterious science vaguely connected with maps, was vitalised into an affair of economics. The food I ate, the cotton threads I pieced together—I began to see that they, too, were a part of geography in its wider sense.

Meanwhile, my brief speech at the Bolton meeting had gained me some local reputation. I began to find that my services as speaker were sought for in Oldham and nearby towns. My " Piecer " letters appeared more frequently than ever.

And then it was that I met an influence far greater than any other that was to shape my future.

1886 A young spinner named Harper joined my circle of acquaintances. He was a level-headed man, determined that the grievances of our class should be given due notice ; and he and I often discussed the future of the newly-formed Piecers' Union, and of Lancashire mill work in general.

One day I accompanied him to his home, and there I met his sister Mary. Her kind, eager face disturbed me. She was a mill hand too. But she was by no means the conventional Victorian girl who simpered and posed. Here was an intellect quicker than my own, and an indignation at the piecers' injustices which burned like a clear flame.

Before I knew what had happened I had plunged into a red-hot argument about necessary changes. Before I left the Harpers' house that night I had fallen in love.

After that I met Mary Harper as often as I could. At the time she worked in a neighbouring mill, but before many months had gone by she came to work in the one at which I was employed. I realised for the first time that what matters most in life is not ambition but happiness.

That happiness I first felt within my grasp when Mary agreed to marry me. Since that day I think I can say we have remained truly happy. The best comrade man ever had has marched with me step by step along Life's road; without her encouragement and inspiration I should long ago have fallen out tired by the wayside, or gone down beneath the feet of the tramping Labour multitude whose pace has often been such that I could not have kept abreast of it alone. 1886

From the very day I first met her, I felt more sure of myself. The meetings at which I spoke began to have a bigger meaning for me. Often I had to pay my own expenses in the way of railway fares and other incidentals, and trifling costs were serious ones to me then. But I got glimpses of Labour becoming coherent and powerful; sometimes, when the words I had learned so painfully stirred my audiences, I felt the magic touch of coming power, not for myself but for my class.

There were still many who laughed at my "new-fangled ideas," or jeered at me because they said I was preaching revolution and discontent. I was told that I should end by antagonising the all-powerful employers, causing worse conditions for cotton workers, and getting myself into gaol. Certainly agitators were gaoled on the most slender grounds in those days, as all of us knew well.

But so long as Mary Harper had faith in me I could pursue my path unflinchingly.

We in Lancashire were not the only sufferers, of course. When I was a young man, I think England was nearer to complete social revolution than she has ever been in modern history. The Throne itself was in danger, and many thought that a Republic would be better for the country. Nowadays, I think the most loyal class is the working class. As the Labour Party has grown in power, the menace of revolution has dwindled. Labour had got many of its demands by quieter means. But, in the 1880's, when Parliament presented an apparently closed door to us, civil war was very near.

Spasmodically and half-heartedly, it broke out from time to time. Strikers armed with bricks and iron railings were cut down by troops with drawn swords.

The first big hunger-marches took place. The unemployed were marched to fashionable churches in London, Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham—a living protest against the practising Christianity of the well-fed church-goers, who held handkerchiefs to their noses as they minced disgustedly by.

1886 In 1886, great riots occurred in Trafalgar Square and elsewhere. John Burns, Battersea engineer and later Privy Councillor, led a mob of demonstrators through the London West End, and rich men crowded into the Club windows to sneer at them as they passed. Bernard Shaw, himself a Socialist, has described what followed :

> "The rich men crowded to the windows to see the poor men pass along ; and Dives, not noticing the absence of the police, mocked Lazarus. Lazarus thereupon broke Dives' windows, and even looted a shop or two, besides harmlessly stoning the carriage of a tactless lady at the Achilles statue."

Dives could not have been so hard at heart, really, I think, for the Lord Mayor's Fund for the relief of unemployment distress rose, immediately after this affair, from £30,000 to £80,000.

But there were other consequences. Trafalgar Square was suddenly closed to agitators, and this was fiercely resented by men, burning with legitimate grievances, who now had nowhere suitable to air them.

Angry Labour leaders announced that, on Sunday, November 13th, 1887, the Square would be "stormed." Squadrons of military, fully armed, and powerful detachments of police, were drafted there to resist any such attempt.

On the appointed day, workers led by Burns and others tried to force a way through the armed ranks, to demonstrate the rights of free speech. Bricks and stones were flung, iron railings crashed on sabres and bayonets, dozens of workmen were wounded, and the attack was beaten off. Burns and others were arrested.

The date is remembered to this day as "Bloody Sunday." 1887

A month or two later, another effort was made to storm the Square, and a workman was killed. Burns made a speech at the funeral, and was again arrested. At his trial at the Old Bailey, H. H. Asquith was Counsel for the Defence. Burns was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment; later, he and Asquith were Cabinet Ministers together.

These unhappy clashes awoke sullen echoes in Lancashire, and all over Britain.

In 1890, in Leeds, the City Gas Committee demanded that their employees should engage themselves for four months at a time, having no power to strike within that period, and that stokers' eight-hour days should be increased. The men refused the terms, and were locked out.

Blacklegs were imported, and fierce fighting took place between the townspeople and the military who guarded the new-comers. The gas gave out, and for five nights Leeds was in complete darkness. Hundreds more police and a regiment of cavalry were sent for.

The cavalry tried to convoy fresh blacklegs through the town, but was trapped under a railway bridge which was crawling with furious men and women. One mob faced the soldiers ahead; another poured down on them from behind; and meanwhile, the townsmen on the bridge literally pulled it to bits with their bare hands, and hurled down tons of brickwork, stones and rubble on the helmeted soldiers and their struggling horses.

Slowly, the defenders were forced off the ruined bridge; bitterly the struggle went on in the streets below till nightfall and fog blotted it out. Women flung themselves against the flattened sabres ; children stood on the outskirts of the whirling battle and hurled stones into it at every gleam of a red jacket.

1887 In Lancashire, the cotton operatives were spoiling for a fight with their oppressors. That came later, as I shall tell.

I have always opposed strike action as a first step, but I was young then, and my blood boiled at the accounts that filtered through to Oldham of these bloody battles to keep the workman chained to poverty and misery. Like most other people at that time, I saw the possibility of an industrial struggle that would end in the storming of prisons and the manning of the barricades. I had to consider whether, if such a civil war broke out, I should take part in it with my kind, or keep out of it.

I was a moderate, but I think loyalty would have called me to the barricades. Fortunately, things never came to that.

Already, the figures of future Parliamentary Labour leaders were emerging from the smoke of the muskets that the troops fired over the heads of insurgent mobs. Ben Tillett organised several dock-strikes, narrowly escaping prison for his trouble. Then he organised a Sea Operatives' and General Labourers' Union.

At eight years old, Tillett was working in a Bristol coal mine. Later, he ran away to sea in a windjammer ; and thereafter he was always associated with the sea and seamen. He founded the Sea Operatives' Union, and from that time he worked tirelessly in trying to gain fair working conditions for the toilers of the sea.

Burns and Tom Mann were already becoming famous in the latter 1880's. They organised strikes, and addressed monster meetings of discontented workmen in London and elsewhere.

In the field of literature, other figures were becoming notable. William Morris gave back to Socialism the earnings of his able pen. He lectured, sold Socialist papers at street corners after writing much of them himself, and wrote poetry or romances always with a Labour outlook. Nor was he a dreamer merely. He declared himself willing to take up arms against the capitalists who would have made a lion of him.

He founded the Socialist League and subsidised its newspaper. Till he died, he fought gallantly for the things in which he believed.

The long, thin figure of George Bernard Shaw was already becoming a sign and a portent. I have quoted him in his description of the West End riot. He wrote furiously and fast on all the aspects of Socialism. He became so famous a Fabian that nowadays many people believe that the term merely indicates a spiritual follower of Shaw.

These were the men whose doings and writings we in Lancashire feverishly discussed, while I was still a young piecer working my twelve-hour days in an Oldham mill. Blindly and angrily, they thumbed at the 1887
wet clay that was to form the Hendersons, the Snowdens and the MacDonalds of the morrow.

Chapter IV

1888–1892—Life as a tub-thumper—Slips of the tongue—Helping a new Union—Will Thorne—Leaving the mill—Working as an "agitator"—Marriage on 40s. a week—The Tolpuddle Martyrs—Inspecting pickets in a lamp-lighters' strike.

1888 By this time, I was earning a pound a week at the mill. I was still on the youthful side of twenty, so my ambition to earn more than my father seemed likely to come true. But already, however dimly, I was envisaging a life far ahead in which I should be able to devote my whole time to forwarding the interests of my fellow-workmen. That meant leaving the mill.

How I was to leave behind me the only employment for which I was trained, I had no idea. More than ever, now I was engaged to Mary Harper, I wanted to earn enough money to provide a comfortable and independent home, which I could ask my betrothed to share. Ambition and love pulled in opposite directions.

Meanwhile, my work for the newly formed Piecers' Union kept me very busy. A colleague, Mr. James Haslam, has described one of the early meetings of the Union in the following words:

> "Groups of piecers, in caps and clogs and scarves, came trooping along the main thoroughfare of the town to meet at the hall we had engaged, whistling, shouting, catcalling, and rattling their clogs on the stone flags, as was their custom. The place of meeting was quickly packed with a concourse of young and middle-aged men, and a sprinkling of women piecers. There was not a linen collar to be seen in the crowd. Some doffed their caps and some did not. Those who had tobacco smoked pipes, mostly of clay.

> " The room was too small. The landing and the staircase were crowded by young operatives full of spirit and all hard up. Outside they yelled for admittance. There was a thick queue across the street which the police had tried—and failed—to remove.
>
> " The turn of Clynes came about nine o'clock. He was nothing to look at—a frail lad, pale and serious in ungainly clothes—much like a Belfast factory type as an artist sees him. For three-quarters of an hour the piecer-orator spoke with well-measured sentences of sincerity and grammatical precision. The audience, which had not been easy to control, laughed with him, and were sad with him.
>
> " Afterwards the chairman of our committee [I was secretary] said to me : ' Wheer did you get that lad fro' ? T' country'll knaw summat abeawt him—if he lives ! ' "

The audience did not always laugh with us. I remember a Socialist shoemaker who spoke at some of our meetings, who was fond of quoting all sorts of Latin phrases. Also, he pasted them all over the window of his shop. Unfortunately, they were, more often than not, far from accurate ; and nearly always, when they were produced at meetings, their learned effect was spoiled by some white-faced, intellectual lad of the better-class type to which Karl Marx has always appealed, who indignantly shouted the correct version from somewhere at the back of the hall. 1888

The so-called " gentlemen spinners " often supplied acid comments on our youthful ambitions. As these men were usually fathers or uncles of ardent young piecers present, the effect was sometimes devastating.

I well remember listening to a burning-eyed lad from a nearby mill uttering a passionate attack from the platform, one evening, against owners, shop-keepers and mill foremen, and ending with a fine bit of invective against the spinners, who, he said, were only anxious to " climb to higher wages across the bodies of the piecers."

" Ah'll show thee what we do to the bodies o' the piecers ! " came an angry rumble from among the audience. " Get thee back home this minute, young Albert, and I'll coom after thee wi' t' old stra-ap ! "

On another occasion, a prominent disciple of Walt Whitman came to speak for us. His rhetoric was very fiery, but as he knew absolutely nothing about the problems of the wheelgate, he began to make some remarkable technical " howlers." The more the audience laughed and uttered good-natured jeers, the more excited and inaccurate he became ; and what started as an indignation meeting soon sounded like a music-hall, cheering, stamping and shouting with laughter at a favourite comic.

The chairman, in an aside which he struggled to make audible to the speaker, above the din that now pervaded the hall, suggested that it might be tactful to bring the oration to a conclusion. The hint was taken.

" That is all I have to say ! " shouted the rhetorician defiantly, " except to add that the time is not far distant when the giant Labour will rise like a Phœnix from the prison cells of capitalist oppression, and the British lion will march hand in hand with the flood-gates of Democracy ! "

Anyone who knows Lancashire will realise how completely this masterly summing-up " brought down the house ! "

1888 In these early days I discovered that public speaking induces a remarkable tendency toward the making of what Disraeli termed " a sophistical rhetorician inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity."

I remember, at a meeting at which I spoke, being heckled persistently by a workman who had refreshed himself rather too thoroughly at a neighbouring tavern. As long as I ignored the interruptions and went on with my speech, I got along quite well. But presently some fresh inane remark diverted my attention, with disastrous consequences.

The chairman declared " that my critic was inspired by something more than his native genius," and pointedly added, " but, of course, one always finds one black sheep among every flock of geese ! "

I must say that the " geese " bore no grudge for this slip of the tongue, fatal as it sounded, but the black sheep was more hilarious than ever.

Of course, it is easy, at this distance of time, to poke fun at the errors we made in the days of our ardent youth.

The fact is that most Labour supporters and speakers then were illiterate youngsters who had left school at ten or twelve years old ; whose parents could not read or write ; and whose hearers, instead of sympathy, more often exhibited unconcealed contempt at the spectacle of young enthusiasts hurling pitifully inadequate words against an economic structure that centuries of poverty, oppression and semi-starvation had welded.

We could not command the services of powerful clubs, organisations and newspapers, as persons of other political persuasions could. The police broke up our meetings, and often our speakers were sent to gaol ; the men from whom we earned the money that inadequately fed and clothed us put us out on the streets if news came to their ears that we were agitating against existing conditions.

Our finances were gathered in halfpennies and pennies, 1889
ill-spared from the pockets of those who knew that such contributions meant less food next day.

I remember speaking at a meeting at which funds were asked for to carry on the cause of the workers. Something was said about the self-sacrifice of those who gave ; and a well-to-do lady who had happened to attend the meeting was so moved that she dropped a sovereign into the cap when the collection was being taken.

Just before the meeting broke up, the money was counted, and the gold coin elicited a buzz of astonishment. It was shown to the chairman, who took it between finger and thumb, went forward to the edge of the platform, and asked for a moment's silence.

"If the person who put this sovereign in the cap in mistake for a halfpenny will come and see me after the proceedings have finished," he announced, "we will gladly restore the coin."

It must be remembered that even workmen occasionally had gold about them in those days when sovereigns were standard coinage; and to such a man the loss of a pound would have meant genuine disaster.

But no workman came to claim the gold. The lady who had given the munificent contribution had a word with the chairman later, and said that our cause was worth all she could possibly spare.

Looking back, I am awed at the task we undertook. That Labour should have progressed so much in less than a hundred years is very little short of a miracle. It has been said that faith can make mountains move from their appointed places.

Faith was the only thing that upheld us in the early days. Collarless, moneyless, almost wordless, we earnestly believed that it was wrong for the ill-educated to be exploited for the benefit of the aristocrats. We were prepared to die for our faith, knowing that others would come after us to whom our failing hands could throw the torch. That we were clod-hoppers and factory-hands did not matter; Christ's disciples were only fishermen, after all. Perhaps their speech was as rough as ours.

1889 During these days—or rather nights—of feverish activity in semi-political pursuits, I was still working my twelve-hour day at the mill. The work was very hard, but occasional gleams of humour lightened it.

Mill fires were very common in those days. They arose from the use of gas or candles, or from the friction of ill-kept machinery. The fibre and cotton material responded to unusual heat like gunpowder to a match. Several times I myself had narrow escapes from losing my life; and men and boys I knew were injured or killed by fire.

To lessen fire risks, and to make sure that the few compulsory safeguards of the time were adequately fitted to guard mill-workers from the more dangerous parts of the whirling machinery, Government inspectors were appointed ; and from these there came periodic sparks of amusement.

When " the finer," as inspectors were called because of their power to inflict fines for breaches of regulations, was due at the mill, word went round from mouth to mouth, and a good many flagrant defiances of the law were discreetly hidden for the time being. Even the spinners and piecers themselves were inclined to sneer at the grandmotherly interference of the Government officials on their behalf.

On one occasion, another piecer and myself ran 1890
through a door and down some steps, thinking to evade the inspector, who we believed was behind us. At the foot of the steps we met a big, friendly man whom we took for a worker from another part of the mill.

" Look out ! " hissed my companion. " Hide theeself ! Some fool of an inspector's poakin' his nose into this plaace ! "

" Quite right, lad," responded the stranger. " I *am* the inspector ! "

I little dreamed, then, that about forty years later, when I was appointed Home Secretary, I should thereby become Chief of our whole Factory Inspection system !

During my boyhood, little or no compensation could be claimed by workmen injured in factories and workshops. Now, a total of somewhere near ten millions each year is paid because of accidents during employment. It is claimed, as it should be, as a right, not sought for on bended knees as a favour.

In my time, there were no unemployment benefits, no cafés or restaurants for meals, no sports grounds or recreation rooms, and no holidays. Hours were arbitrarily fixed by employers, and to strike or even protest against such arrangements was to court instant dismissal.

Just after I attained my majority, I was asked by some labourers in Oldham to assist them to form a local branch of the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers, which Mr. Will Thorne was at that time in process of founding.

Will Thorne had already had a remarkable career. At six years old, he was working in a rope-walk in Birmingham, so as to earn enough to enable his parents to feed him. When he reached manhood, he was a gas-worker, getting a pound a week for nearly eighty hours of labour.

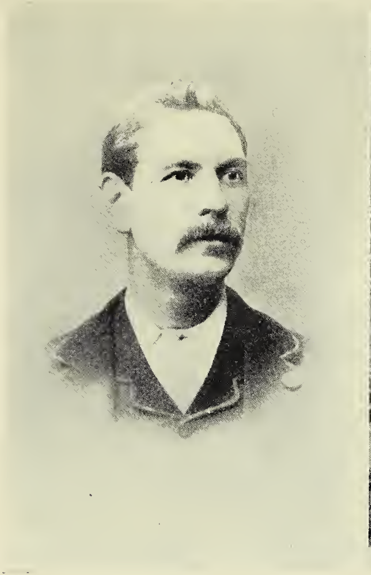
Then, his employers introduced a new invention known as " the iron man," which enabled two men, by working as hard as four men, to do four men's work. Thorne and others walked out, after several of their comrades had broken down in health, through trying to work faster than was humanly feasible. All were dismissed.

Will Thorne then walked from Birmingham to London, and found employment there at the Beckton Gasworks. In 1886, he led a column of angry workers from Canning Town to Trafalgar Square, where Labour meetings had been forbidden. In the ensuing riot, he was one of the casualties of " Bloody Sunday." In 1889, he founded the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union.

The Oldham men who wanted to form a local branch of this union were all of them older than I. But they needed a secretary who " had eddication," and my peculiar fondness for books was well known. Also, my " Piecer " letters and my platform talks had gained me a certain local fame.

I threw myself into the new task with an eagerness that was largely inspired by my admiration for Will Thorne's uncompromising fight against oppression. Constantly, through being too outspoken at the meetings of the new Union, I received warnings that I was running a danger of getting myself imprisoned. However, I was there to speak out, and I had to do it.

1892 One night, at a big meeting organised to gather recruits for the new Oldham branch, something happened that



WILL THORNE, 1889
He transferred Clynes from cotton to politics.

WILL THORNE, 1934

profoundly affected my future life. It has been described since by no less a person than Will Thorne himself. He says :

> " There was a crowd all right, but to my amazement it was gathered about a mere slip of a lad, hardly more than a boy. Having come to be amused, I remained to be amazed. After three-quarters of an hour's dissertation from this stripling, I decided that he knew as much about Lancashire's industrial troubles as I did myself—a big enough concession for the Will Thorne of those days, I can assure you."

After that meeting Mr. Thorne asked me to have a word with him. He put a good many questions about my life in the mill, my previous experience at organising, and the difficulties I had faced in founding the Piecers' Union, and in assisting the new branch of the Gasworkers' and General Labourers' Union in Oldham. Then he tapped his fingers thoughtfully on the table.

" I can offer you a job, if you like," he said slowly. 1892
" It will be work just as hard as you do now in the mill. The pay will be about the same as you get now. The job will quite possibly run you into prison. Whether or not it has any future is more than I can say. An organiser is wanted for the Lancashire area of our new Union. What do you think about it ? "

Of course, I was tremendously tempted to accept. But it meant giving in my notice at the mill ; and in those days jobs once abandoned were swiftly filled from among the ranks of the hungry unemployed. I thought it over.

" I'll do it ! " I said at last.

Thorne gripped my hand. " I'm glad you're coming in with us," he said warmly. " I believe you'll do great things for us some day. They will start you at thirty shillings a week, but you'll have to pay certain expenses out of that, and goodness knows whether it will ever increase."

Twenty-one years later I became President of the

National Union, and have remained so ever since. Will Thorne was always one of my closest friends, on whose wise advice I have many times relied.

My new status meant a complete revolution in my life. In the first place, I was able to say farewell to the mill. Passing out of the great, grim building, with my discharge wages jingling in my pocket, I wondered a little uneasily how soon I should be back there again, begging for a job. That contingency has never occurred ; I was saying good-bye to mill life for ever, though I did not know it.

After the fashion of small children, I have left the best till last. My wages having jumped to over forty shillings a week, the greatest ambition in my life in those days was now within reach. I could go to Mary Harper, to whom I had been engaged for four years, and ask her to marry me.

1892 It does not seem a very big income on which to marry, but we found it sufficient. We rented a little cottage, and got together a few articles of necessary furniture from a few pounds I had saved. The front room contained nothing but curtains and a table. As we were able, we saved a few shillings, and bought a chair, linoleum, or whatever we could afford. We would never get anything till we could pay for it. It was a great adventure, and splendid fun.

Indeed, I think it made us as proud at our success as our residence in Downing Street did some thirty years later.

The task of the Union to which I had attached myself was a very difficult one. Conditions, particularly among gasworkers in those days, were appalling. Twelve-hour shifts were the rule, and these were often extended to eighteen hours on the arbitrary decision of the foreman. Wages ranged from about a pound a week to thirty shillings or so, for work that was exceptionally arduous and often dangerous. Sometimes men had to work over eighty hours in a single week.

A petition was drawn up asking the gas companies and corporations to introduce an eight-hour day, but not for a very long time did we reach that millennium.

During one of the first strikes officially supported by the Union, a tremendous impetus was given to the work by a loan of £4000 from a wealthy sympathiser. Formerly, the men's shilling entrance-fees had often been collected, at big meetings, in buckets. Now, however, we had the force of real finance behind us. The £4000 was soon repaid.

My branch in Oldham rapidly became a flourishing one. Cruel conditions were our best recruiting-sergeants; they drove men into our ranks.

In addition to speaking in Lancashire, I began now to travel further afield. 1892

How vividly I remember my first long journey away from Oldham. I had to attend a conference of the Union at Plymouth. To get there entailed a railway journey down the length of England. Men of my own class were driving the engine and acting as porters. I remember a sensation of power as I glimpsed a future in which all these men would be teamed up together with mill-hands, seamen, gas-workers—in fact, Labour everywhere—for the benefit of our own people.

The least change of accent in speech, as we stopped at various towns, fascinated me, and I noted varieties of face, dress and manner. But these things were superficial—the cardinal fact emerged that these working people were all potential allies in Labour's coming battle for freedom and justice.

That was a wonderful journey for me, who had never before been out of the Lancashire murk. To look through the carriage windows and see grass and bushes that were really green instead of olive, trees that reached confidently up to the sun instead of our stunted things, houses that were mellow red and white and yellow, with warm red roofs, instead of the Lancashire soot and slates, and stretches of landscape in which the eye could not find a single factory chimney belching—this was sheer magic! I began to experience an inexhaustible wonder at the gracious beauties of the world outside factory-land, and this sensation has never wholly left me.

That first long railway journey was as wonderful to me as if I had been riding upon the magic carpet in the "Arabian Nights' Entertainments."

And more and more strongly as I gazed, I felt a sense of indignation that the world should be so generous and so lovely, and yet that men, women and children should be cooped up in black and exhausted industrial areas like Oldham, merely so that richer men could own thousands of acres of sunlit country-side of whose existence many of the mill-workers hardly even dreamed.

Long-distance journeys such as this one to Plymouth were apt to cut into my salary. Although the Union had not promised me any definite allowance for expenses, it helped as far as the slender means at that time allowed. All of us, from the Chief Secretary downwards, had to make up from our own pockets the differences which the funds in hand could not afford ; but our hearts were in the work.

In a balance sheet at about the time of my Plymouth journey occurs the entry :

> "Expenditure : J. R. Clynes, away from home two nights, allowed 2s."

Three shillings and sixpence was allowed if one had to be away on Union business for a whole day and night. One might say, therefore, that hotels were out of the question !

1892 But here, again, our very deficiencies caused us a foretaste of triumph. Our organisers, had they been obliged to depend on their salaries and expense-allowances, could never have travelled more than a few miles from home. But the *camaraderie* of Labour was such that workmen in the towns we visited clubbed together and gave their tobacco-money for a week to help with railway fares ; others, going short of food themselves, offered meals ; others, again, would sleep in cellars, garrets and outhouses so as to free a bed for the Union delegate.

During my early days as an agitator, I slept frequently in attics, and sometimes in stranger places than that !

The membership of the new Union grew rapidly. In Lancashire, when I was appointed district organiser, we numbered some 2000 members, and had a quarterly income of under £200. When I left, the membership exceeded 50,000, and the quarterly income was over £28,000. The Lancashire district was for a long time the largest in the Union, and it has led the way in many movements which have developed and strengthened the organisation.

It is amazing, now, to look back on my early days as organiser. I had no office or staff, and did all the work myself. I addressed meetings which I had previously organised, distributed handbills at street-corners, went all over the county speaking to builders, gas-workers, umbrella stick makers and others. In each case, I had to study their trade thoroughly before speaking, as they were very quick to detect the weakness of an orator who did not know the technique of the trade whose members he was addressing.

In later years, the Union changed its name to the National Union of General and Municipal Workers. It is now one of the most powerful bodies of organised labour in the country, and distributes some £40,000 a year in death claims alone. The annual income is roundly £300,000. The Reserve Funds exceed £700,000. The Union has several of its men in Parliament, and 446 of its members serve on local authorities throughout the country .

Yet, less than a hundred years ago, when a group of labourers in the Dorset village of Tolpuddle tried to form a Trade Union to protest against the 8s. that each was paid as full wages for an eighty-hour working week, they were tried for mutiny and sedition and sentenced to seven years' transportation with hard labour.

Even in the 1890's, when I was an agitator myself, the word was one of evil omen. We stood in constant 1892 danger of imprisonment. We who represented the workers in their demand for fair living wages stood for peace, not war, for right, not wrong, for just settlement, not illegal violence.

But, because we would not cry " Peace " where there was none, we were dubbed agitators, until the word became a title of honour rather than a label of scorn.

Not all our troubles came from the employers. I remember being involved in a dispute, soon after my first Trade Union appointment, when the Oldham lamplighters went on strike. They were members of our Union, and so it became my duty to supervise a system of pickets to prevent the employment of blackleg labour.

I had not been long at the task when an enemy wrote to the local paper stating that I could be seen leading the unhappy lamplighters, who had to walk in the gutter while I marched along the pavement smoking a sixpenny cigar. Even a twopenny cigar was a great luxury for workmen at that time.

1892 The accusation was brought up against me at a public meeting. Realising that I must enlist the audience on my side, I replied instantly that I never smoked anything less than shilling cigars. Actually, I did not smoke at all until many years later ; but my reply was sufficiently fantastic to cause a burst of laughter, after which my critic had nothing further to say.

Chapter V

1892–1896—An historic Congress at Bradford—Formation of the I.L.P.—Robert Blatchford—First meeting with G. B. S.—An International Conference at Zurich—Argument by weapons—A cotton strike—Nationalisation proposed—Nearly mobbed—Early Trade Union work.

My earliest years as a Trade Union official were fraught with new and perplexing problems, and with difficulties which found us unprepared. Unions were then considered almost semi-criminal organisations, and every effort was made by the majority of employers to break up their growing strength. 1892

During 1892, out of a total income of £15,000, the Union paid out over £11,000 in Dispute Benefit. Not a year passed without our being involved in troublesome strikes and lock-outs.

It soon became obvious that Unions acting only in the affairs of the workshop could never attain their objects satisfactorily. These objects went further than mere isolated protests against unfair conditions in specified trades; they aimed at an eventual state when the whole of Britain should accept as a working axiom the Biblical assurance that "A labourer is worthy of his hire." We wanted the men who made the profits to share the profits to a larger degree.

With these things in mind, a number of ardent Labour sympathisers, of whom I was one, wanted preparations for political action to supplement industrial organisation. We agreed to gather in conference at Bradford, in the autumn of 1892. There were about 120 representatives present, and affairs were conducted in an unexciting and orderly manner. None of us, I think, realised that the Conference would make history, or that we were assisting at the birth of a new Parliamentary Party whose leaders should one day, and in our day, accept seals of office from the King.

A resolution was passed uniting various scattered local independent organisations into a new body to be called the Independent Labour Party.

At this conference, two important personalities were Keir Hardie and Robert Blatchford. I have mentioned elsewhere some of the outstanding facts of Hardie's early career. I found him a remarkable character, and he was the natural leader of the conference. He was a living confutation of the gibe so often flung at Labour leaders that they are "in politics because politics pay." Hardie was guided by a clear spiritual quality which never flinched from unpopularity and hate, and never wavered before flattery. Like Joan of Arc, he obeyed an inner voice.

1892 "Read Mill and Carlyle and Marx and the Socialists," he said to me once, "but don't be afraid to read the other side too. Read everything you can ; thus comes knowledge."

Robert Blatchford was another unique spirit. On the platform, he was awkward, shy and ineffective. But with his pen, he could make labourers understand higher economics ! He wrote *Merrie England* and other brilliant propagandist books ; for a dozen years or more, he was Labour's chief recruiting officer.

Some notable figures flocked to the new Independent Labour Party which raised its standard so quietly at Bradford. Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Pete Curran, Ben Tillett and others were recruited ; a little later came Tom Mann, Mrs. Pankhurst and Margaret Bondfield. From the first the Party appealed to women, and very soon women's suffrage became an important issue espoused by it.

At a Labour Conference during the following year, 1893, I was to enjoy two notable experiences. One was to leave the British shores and for the first time to venture into that greater world outside our tiny island ; and the other was to meet that already celebrated young Fabian Socialist, George Bernard Shaw.

Mr. Shaw's name first connects with Socialism in the minutes of a Fabian Society meeting held on May 16th, 1884. In the following September, he made his first contribution to the Society's literature—a typically provocative manifesto on Fabianism. For many years, the value of his writings to Labour could hardly be overestimated.

By 1893, he was already well known, and I had come across some of his writings on Labour subjects. But I had no idea that he was to attend the International Conference at Zurich until I actually met him there, in a rather amusing manner. 1893

I reached Zurich on the day before the Conference was due to open. My journey over the Channel, through poplar-lined France and into the rosy-tinted mountains of Switzerland was an experience never to be forgotten. The pale-faced mill-lad was seeing for the first time the glories of the earth.

The Swiss lake in morning sunlight seemed to me to be the most heavenly thing in the world. Its blueness transcended words. I, whose swimming formerly had been furtively indulged in during stolen moments in Lancashire mill-ponds, was anxious with an almost pagan desire to plunge bodily into that glinting sapphire lake.

While I was swimming there, enjoying what was undoubtedly one of the greatest delights of my life so far, I saw a ruddy beard on the surface of the water, floating gently towards me, under the guidance of another young Irishman who later proved to be Mr. Shaw. That floating beard was the forerunner (if I may so describe it) of a friendship I have always prized.

When we returned to the shores of the lake after our swim, we got into conversation and discovered each other's identity. People have described Shaw as nothing but a showman, but nothing can be further from the truth when he is discussing politics. Then, he is tremendously sincere and overwhelmingly vital. His satirical humour never deserts him, as political opponents have learned many times to their cost ; but it only underlines the essential burning desire for truth and justice which is so typical of the man.

Later, at the Conference Hall, Mr. Shaw and I often sat together, with one or two other British delegates. We were destined to see some amazing happenings there.

In those days, to attend an International Labour Conference was a great experience. Men from the twenty principal nations of the world assembled, to present conflicting points of view from lands with very different degrees and standards of liberty. For the first time I realised that, bad as labour conditions were in Britain, they were infinitely worse in certain other parts of the world.

At that Conference, it was difficult to co-ordinate the statements of the stolid British delegates, abhorring armed violence, as much as mock heroics, with the inflammatory verbal orgies of the representatives of certain of the Latin and Slavonic races. Doubtless, their urge towards violence was greater than ours ; but the vigour with which they disagreed among themselves would have been amusing had it not been somewhat dangerous.

1893 At one point in the proceedings, insults flew like shuttles back and forth. Suddenly, amid the uproar, a delegate from a Southern land drew and flourished a glittering knife. In a moment, other members began to fumble as if for revolvers ; everyone was yelling and struggling ; and it looked as though something resembling a bloody tavern brawl would develop.

But a voice more powerful than the uproar cut across it like a clap of thunder, as the President of the Congress demanded order. The menace in his tones arrested uplifted knife and half-drawn gun. In the second of comparative silence that followed, a dozen moderates could be heard using scorn and logic as whips with which to lash the brawlers into submission. Then, with growls and shufflings, the weapons were sheathed and the Conference resumed its business.

"Behold man in a state of true equality!" murmured Shaw to me, grinning wickedly.

The differences which had caused the outburst were racial. They grew out of passions and hatreds fomented by unending years of war on the continent of Europe. Each delegate saw, in his rival, the representative of a nation that had perhaps killed his father and invaded his homestead. Such is the bitter fruit that past wars produce.

It is not too much to say that in the fierce feuds of that Zurich Conference of 1893, I saw for the first time the European rivalries that later with other factors led to the War of 1914.

The worst of these International Congresses, however, produced certain good results; and incidentally afforded inspiring and picturesque glimpses of great and colourful assemblies and processions, vivid with an enthusiasm that can never be associated with political gatherings in Britain.

Here, at a Labour procession, men walk mostly on the pavements. On the Continent they march in serried ranks in the roads. Here, by our decisions, we try to benefit the people as a whole. There, too often, the endeavour seems to be to destroy rather than to build up.

Destruction cannot bring happiness, not even when the tune to which it comes is the tramp of a Labour army. A cultivation of what is known as "class war" can do nothing to improve the wise direction of organised labour effort.

My friendship with Shaw, thus curiously begun, developed quickly. I often met him after our return to England, and in a later year he agreed to take the chair for me at a Fabian Society meeting.

The meeting was a great success. Shaw has always been a brilliant speaker as well as a provocative writer. During the early years of the Fabian Society he spoke 1893 constantly at public meetings, drawing crowded audiences. He always gave of his best, whether there were two thousand listeners or only twenty. That is the hall-mark of the true artist.

His subject at one such meeting I attended was—"That the Working Class is Useless, and should be Abolished!" With his paradoxical wit, he proved that the working class should be abolished by giving it national ownership of industry, thus making workers and masters one body.

Shaw is often chided for being trivial, and for writing in a manner merely to make himself different from everyone else. He would, however, have touched the highest intellectual level and signified his greatness had he written no more than *St. Joan* and *Back to Methuselah.*

1893 was a troubled year in Lancashire, where I was still living and working as a minor Union official. The clouds which had been gathering for so long broke in storm. The big mill owners, finding trade slackening, ordered a ten per cent all-round reduction in the men's wages, so as to keep profits unchanged. The men could hardly find food and clothes with what they were getting. To many of them the proposed cut meant slow starvation.

They refused to accept the terms, and suggested placing the mills on short time as an alternative.

The answer of the owners was an immediate and universal lock-out.

1893 The familiar Oldham streets along which I had tramped so often to the jenny-gate were filled with sullen, starving loungers. All over Lancashire it was the same. There were "incidents." One owner was stoned as he drove dangerously and carelessly through a throng of workmen, who had to jump aside to avoid his horses' hoofs. Windows were broken; men were burnt in effigy.

There were also other "incidents" of which no public notice was given. In poorer homes, children wailing for bread grew so feeble that they no longer disturbed nature's serenity with their cries. They died; and collarless men in clogs, who had pawned their overcoats and jackets to get food, begged and borrowed to get them out of pawn again, so as to follow respectfully clad at the funerals.

For twenty weeks the Lancashire mills were silent. 1893 Twenty grim weeks of hunger, tears and bitter cold. Then a compromise was reached, on the ground of a three per cent cut, and an agreement to settle further wage changes by mutual discussion.

As I was no longer employed in a mill, I did not suffer as severely as most of the men I had known. It was fortunate for me.

Later in the same year I had to cross the sea again, this time to Belfast, to attend a Conference there. At that Conference a historic resolution was tabled. It read :

> " Candidates receiving financial assistance must pledge themselves to support the principle of collective ownership and control of all the means of production and distribution . . ."

Thus Labour first nailed nationalisation to its mast, to remain there challengingly to this day, though the Tories and Liberals have tried unceasingly to haul it down. In the end it is probable that the Conservative Party will adopt some skilfully-hidden form of nationalisation as something brilliant which it has thought out all by itself to save England, just as it adopted Women's Suffrage and many other measures from the Labour side, as soon as they became inevitable. But any such adoption will be so modified that it will merely serve to cloak further private profit-making, until the day when Labour succeeds in placing the proceeds of our great national industries in the pocket of the nation instead of in the purses of greedy self-seekers.

The resolution I have quoted was supported at Belfast by Pete Curran and myself, and was carried, amid scenes of remarkable triumph, by 137 votes to 97.

A year later, in 1894, I attended another Conference, 1894 held this time at Norwich, during which delegates returned doggedly to the burning question of nationalisation. And a burning question it was indeed, for the older school of Labour, though prepared to support Land Nationalisation, were reluctant to go further, and said very strongly that we who did were endangering the whole Party to loss of support from all thoughtful people.

After long debates which sometimes waxed both bitter and personal, a Manchester delegate moved a resolution declaring that "in the opinion of this Congress it is essential to the maintenance of British industries to nationalise land, mines, minerals, and royalty rents."

Keir Hardie was on his feet instantly.

"I wish to suggest an amendment," he began in his arresting manner. "There can be no argument in favour of nationalising lands and mines which does not equally apply to every form of production. If the mines from which we dig minerals are to be nationalised, why not the railways which carry those minerals? Why not the depots where they are deposited, and the works in which they are manufactured? Why shall the landlord be attacked and the capitalist go free?"

He was fiercely opposed, but in the end his amendment that all means of production, distribution and exchange should be nationalised was carried by 219 votes to 61.

I did not dream it at the time, but now I both hope and believe that I may live long enough to hear a majority proportionately as convincing declare, in the House of Commons, that this resolution of Keir Hardie's in 1894 is well on its way to becoming the Law of England. The Labour Party will never rest till this is accomplished.

It must not be supposed that my time was taken up extensively, or even very largely, in attending these congresses. I emphasise them only because they were milestones in Labour's march to recognition; though they did not always seem so at the time! Many of them, indeed, with their puny records of little things done, their tales of great failures and disheartening desertions, and their wild strivings against a system that seemed as immobile as it was vicious, left us all with a sense of gloom and disillusionment.

I often think of those almost forgotten conferences to-day, when I read of the ranting of newly-fledged Communists against what they term the timidity and equivocation of Labour's Old Guard. Kipling's unforgettable words come to mind :

"Well I know who'll take the credit—all the clever chaps that
followed—
Came, a dozen men together—never knew my desert fears ;
Tracked me by the camps I'd quitted, used the water-holes I'd
hollowed.
They'll go back and do the talking. *They'll* be called the
Pioneers ! "

Not that it matters, so long as Labour wins through in the end.

I wonder how some of them would have fared in the early days ! I remember an occasion in 1895, when I took an unwilling part in an adventure which might have tested some of them. 1895

It occurred in connection with an extensive strike in a Lancashire print works, where men and women employees had joined issue with the owners over an important wage question. They were connected with another Union, and my contact with them was simply that of a sympathetic visitor.

I went to the works in company with a Scottish colleague, Bruce Glasier, very well known as a propagandist in Socialist and Labour circles, and we nearly paid the penalty with our lives !

At the time of our visit the company had obtained the services of a large number of blacklegs, nearly all of whom were Scotsmen belonging to an anti-Labour organisation known as the Free Labour Society. These men, armed with life-preservers and marching behind a Union Jack and a drum and fife band, had entered the works with colours flying, but required a considerable force of police to accompany them to prevent them coming to blows with the angry strikers whom they had temporarily displaced.

My colleague and I found a knot of blue uniforms at the works gate. We passed through, and tried in vain to get a glimpse inside a substantial stone building which, so local rumour persistently had it, had been turned into a fort, stocked with Winchesters and ammunition and food, to which the blacklegs could retreat if the strikers attacked them in force.

We left the works to try to obtain some lunch, and afterwards to speak to the strikers, but the latter were somewhat too previous for us. We very suddenly found ourselves surrounded by a group of angry men, who mistook us for blackleg agents.

" Are you Scotch ? " asked one, who seemed to be a leader.

" Why, yes," answered my companion. His accent settled it ! He was starting an explanation when one of the men at the back of the group uttered an oath, and flung a stone whizzing by within an inch of my friend's head.

A shout of " Spies ! " and " Blacklegs ! " went up, and a great crowd formed round us before we could even shout anything in our own defence. Here was a peculiar and—from a spectator's viewpoint—an amusing situation. Two staunch Labour men, coming to speak in sympathy with some angry strikers, were in danger of unpleasant death merely because one of us rolled his " r's " like the Scotch blacklegs in the works.

1895 The humour of the situation did not strike me at the time—a divot of turf did so instead. Matters looked very ugly, and I do not want to hear again the inarticulate crescendo roaring of a crowd out for blood.

Something had to be done quickly. Seeing a low wall beside me, I jumped up on to it, and, in a voice which I vainly tried to send above the gathering uproar, revealed myself as Clynes of Oldham, and my friend as Bruce

Glasier, husband of Kathrine St. John Conway, a most popular woman speaker in the Labour cause. These names were known to many of our attackers, and there was a moment's pause, though we were still menaced by darkling, hungry faces. Then we were recognised.

Into the lull I flung whatever words entered my mind. I am afraid I achieved no great flights of eloquence, for I was much too anxious to be ready to dodge the missiles that surrounded me, having no desire to experience the Biblical punishment of being stoned to death. However, it was not yet too late for an appeal to reason, and gradually the arms that held the stones to throw went down.

When, at last, I jumped from that wall our attackers had become our friends, and gave us some rousing cheering, which must have made the real culprits inside the works lift their heads to listen with something of apprehension. The change resolved itself into a persistent invitation to us to return for a great public meeting that same night. We did; and it was an immense success.

The position of a Trade Union official is not invariably a happy one, and has never been so. He is a man who works for two masters whose views are too often diametrically opposed. The men who appoint him have the right to demand his loyalty, and the employers with whom he has to deal on behalf of the men expect fairness and reason. A mediator in such a case often realises that a display of uncompromising heroics which would gain him personal popularity with the men would automatically submit those same men to the agonies of an unfair and unprofitable strike that would end in their own complete defeat.

From the moment I left the mill negotiations became 1895
my everyday work. In most industries to-day these negotiations proceed with automatic precision. Councils, boards and conferences bring together representatives of the two sides, and agreements are reached as the results of discussion and bargain.

During my early years as a Trade Union official, however, only a few of the more enlightened employers would condescend to meet us at all, unless they were forced to do so because they faced Unions whose power already made them dangerous to ignore. We leaders of the newer Unions had to battle for the existence of our organisations, amid the contemptuous indifference of employers, and the open hostility of their agents.

How often I used to send memorandums and appeals, couched in the most respectful terms, to employers, and even to their secretaries, and was not able to extract so much as the courtesy of a postcard in reply!

1896 Often, too, when I followed such advances by a personal visit, I was informed by sycophantic butlers that "His Lordship desires that you shall be plainly informed, once and for all, that no third party will ever be allowed to interfere between His Lordship and his men"; and then the door was ostentatiously closed in my face.

Under opposition such as this, one had to meet obstinacy with guile. I remember one occasion when I managed to convert a particularly dogged employer of the old school by first conducting with him a fairly lengthy discussion on the merits of Shakespeare.

This man had stated frequently and openly that he would have nothing to do with "a pack of illiterate, self-seeking agitators!" But the quarrymen who worked for him had asked the Union to intervene, and it fell to my lot to approach the employer.

With considerable persistence I succeeded in obtaining an interview with him. I quoted a line from *Much Ado About Nothing*, and he stared in astonishment. Then we plunged into a discussion about Shakespeare's comedies, which lasted us till luncheon was announced.

Hearing the butler's voice, he started and dragged out a big gold watch.

"Tut, tut! I'd no idea the time had gone so quickly," he said. "You'll stay to lunch, of course!"

Over the fish we commenced a new argument about Shakespeare's value as a historian and, later, my host queried a remark of mine that I knew certain scenes from some of the historical plays off by heart. So, when the coffee cups had been removed, I declaimed the whole of one longish scene from *Julius Cæsar* to him.

After that, I tactfully led back the conversation to the subject of the strike. It was speedily settled, and that night I was able to convey to the men the good news that the concessions for which they had decided to fight were granted.

On another occasion I remember how what promised to be a very serious strike was settled at the outset because of a quotation from the Bible. 1896

The employer in this case was a man who strongly supported numerous charities and was a devout churchman, but in business affairs he was scrupulous and exacting. While he would willingly give most generously to any workman temporarily incapacitated by an accident or illness, or whose family needed support, he liked to feel that this was sheer benevolence, and that his men had no claims on him at all, beyond the meagre wages he paid them. When he issued a sudden imperious edict one day reducing wages, he no doubt intended to see personally that no actual want occurred among his workpeople ; but this state of things was unsatisfactory and risky for them.

I led a deputation to see him, and he ended an absolute ultimatum to us by quoting the Biblical phrase—" He that doth not work, neither shall he eat ! "

One of the members of my deputation was a labourer of the missionary type, an earnest, simple man who believed that guidance for every situation in life could be found in the Bible. In a moment he had crashed down his fist on the employer's leather-topped desk.

" Aye," he said, in a deep, musical voice that rang with sincerity. " And remember, Maister, 'tis also written—' Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn ! ' "

I don't think the employer expected an angry strike deputation to tackle economics quite in that way.

" No ! " he said slowly. " No—I remember that."

He sat in silence for a moment ; and then he agreed unreservedly to return his men's wages to their former level. Having come primed with many arguments, we filed out of the house again, somewhat at a loss, victorious 1896 without the battle ever having been joined.

Even to-day there are still a few employers who are unconscious of their impertinence in refusing to deal with the representatives of " their own men."

" Their own men " are not like other forms of property. Men are not the private possession of the Capitalist. Workmen do not beg for the favour of being heard in their own way. They demand to be heard as a right.

Managers, employers' agents, and all who are hired by Capital to serve the employers' interests, are as much " third parties " as Trade Union officials. Shareholders and investors are one party ; the workmen are a second ; managers, directors and the rest are a third. If workmen insisted on dealing direct with their real employers—namely, the investing public, and shareholders—how offended and startled would be the managers and directors who refuse to deal with us !

Only the unenlightened employer fails to recognise not merely the industrial value of the Trade Union, but the social and national value as well. The Unions have conferred benefits upon millions who have never belonged to them, and in raising the level of the largest class in the country they have lifted standards of living for nearly every class in addition to their own.

The British method of conference and unfettered discussion is a right which was not easily won, and which at all costs must be retained. Because of it, this country is now more free from serious industrial disturbances than any other great nation in the world.

Chapter VI

1896–1902—Formation of the Labour Party—Ramsay MacDonald—The Labour Representation Committee—The "Khaki Election"—Queen Victoria's death—The Taff Vale decision—Labour consternation—Winston Churchill in 1901.

In 1896 I took my first big step forward in the Trade Union for which I had now been working for some years. I was offered the post of Secretary for the 1896 Lancashire district. The new task involved fresh responsibilities, but it also considerably increased my chances of serving my own class in its struggle for fair treatment and political recognition.

Curiously enough, one of the most difficult of my tasks was to persuade the workmen I represented that arbitration often paid them better in industrial disputes than the fierce strikes in which their repressed emotions so eagerly sought outlet.

It has been my experience, during a lifetime of labour problems, that arbitration is more profitable than fighting. In industrial as in other wars the winner stands to lose, and often pays heavily for victory. But masses of men, at times, do not understand the object of arbitration, and officials have to lead up to it tactfully.

I remember in my early days as Secretary for the Lancashire district of my Union an old workman at a big dispute meeting saying: "I propose that we go to arbitration provided we get our terms!"

Sometimes we had to compromise in unpleasing ways. It was then a case of the choice of the lesser evil.

In the great strikes of those years, some of them bitter and prolonged, entered into perhaps to secure a minimum wage of a mere pound a week for skilled workers whose service was of high value, we Union officials sometimes saw heart-breaking sights. For our own sakes, and for the sakes of the men who were fighting, we had to harden our hearts.

The longer the struggle, the more terrible the conditions under which the strikers had to exist. Thousands of them in those days used to live at a level below that of paupers or prisoners. We helped them as well as we could, even when such assistance meant abandoning minor theoretical points to our opponents.

On one occasion a rich manufacturer wanted to win a local election in Lancashire, and believed that he would be defeated if a certain working man opposed him as Labour candidate. A strike was in progress; and the manufacturer asked me to accept a cheque for fifty pounds for our relief funds.

I agreed to do so, but, before taking it, I announced to a mass meeting of half-starved workmen that, whatever the motive, I preferred to make sure of fifty pounds' worth of bread, rather than a few votes in a local election. Those men relied on their Union for practical help, and they got it.

A great part of my work before I was elected to Parliament consisted in an endless round of Labour meetings, at which I preached the gospel of the new Party that was forming all over Great Britain.

Much of my opposition came from members of my own Union. Hundreds of working men, whose Union official and servant I was, wrote or sent resolutions protesting against my support of the Labour Party, because they themselves were Liberals or Tories, and they found my wages!

1896 I addressed many meetings of such members, and told them that as they had the right to belong to their chosen Parties, so had I a right to oppose them. If they thought that an employer should discharge a man for the political opinions he held, then they could discharge me, though I believed that I held and expressed my opinions for their good. Usually, having heard my side of the question, they supported me in the future in all questions where, by doing so, they had not to go against their own ideals.

The spirit of those early groups of workmen is worth remembering. Labour has come to power since because the deep-rooted beliefs of millions of humble people, striving week by week, and setting aside tiny margins from inadequate wages to finance their faithful venture, have created a force that no power or wealth on earth could eventually withstand.

The Labour pioneers of the 1890's, from the leaders to the most illiterate supporters, were upheld by a deep sense of the religious necessity for their work. Many, indeed, were deeply religious people.

Some were also stern Sabbatarians, and with these I came into conflict at times. My work became so pressing that I could not do it all in six days, no matter how early I rose, or how late I groped my tired way to bed. I felt then, as I still do, that working for Labour was a practical form of religion; and I saw no harm in addressing meetings, or doing necessary work, on the one day of the week when almost all workmen were free to attend.

In 1897 I was appointed President of the Oldham 1897 Trades Council, and later became Secretary, which position I held for twenty-five years. This Council was the second largest in the kingdom, and has always represented an enormous number of cotton operatives; so that here I was able to serve the men among whom I had worked as a boy.

The following year I was sent as a delegate for the Trades Council to the Oldham Chamber of Commerce. The experience I gained at this Chamber, where I sat at the same table with employers and learned to understand their points of view, was invaluable. I seldom agreed with them; but it is impossible to convince a man or to foresee his moves in a labour dispute unless you first of all take the trouble to become familiar with the workings of his mind.

This is an axiom that some of our more uncompromising die-hards of to-day might profitably study.

In the Chamber of Commerce I had often to listen to statements that hurt me, and to decisions that angered me. But, because of the knowledge I gathered, and the breadth of vision that I painfully acquired, I listened as patiently as I could, and did what might be done to forward the interests which had sent me there.

I took an early opportunity of condemning trade gambling and cornering of goods, and I denounced the system by which swarms of speculators took great benefits from the cotton industry, which they did nothing to support, and looked upon as a sort of glorified Monte Carlo.

I was venomously attacked for making such unpleasant statements, and told that I knew nothing at all about commerce. Nowadays both employers and men endorse the condemnation which they formerly so strongly opposed.

1898 I attended an I.L.P. Conference at Birmingham in 1898 at which a number of notable and interesting people gathered. One of them was Edward Carpenter, author, poet and propagandist, and one of the staunchest supporters of Labour in those days. Like Shaw and other writers, he devoted a good part of his income to financing needy Labour organisations. He spoke at meetings and led processions, almost always wearing sandals and a striking country dress.

His hymn " England, arise ! " was the marching song to which our Forlorn Hopes tramped to meet victory or defeat.

But, by the time of the 1898 Conference, another song was replacing it ; one which has since been heard all over the world. I refer, of course, to " The Red Flag." Its author, Jim Connell, spoke at the Conference ; he had been for many years a famous writer of Socialist propaganda.

" The Red Flag," as Connell used to delight to say, was written in time stolen from an " exploiting employer, who thus unwittingly paid his wage-slave for composing a revolutionary anthem ! " Originally published as a twopenny pamphlet to raise money for Socialist meetings, the song was set to the tune of " The White Cockade " ; but it never really became popular until that air was discarded, and the words were set to the famous music of " Tannenbaum."

Connell was an enormous man, who invariably affected a flowing cloak, and a gigantic, wide-brimmed hat of picturesque appearance. He boasted that he had poached more game from the landed classes than any other man living ; and he used to give lectures on " The Game Laws " for the I.L.P., always keeping his audience in a continuous roar of laughter.

We had a very versatile set of propagandists to choose from at that time !

I never cared for Connell's song, feeling that there was too much blood and warfare in it, but it has come to stay. His boast with respect to poaching was no empty one. He was an expert and gloried in it. His view was that God gave the land to the people, and that what the poacher did was highly moral and proper. Connell, however, did not leave everything to Providence. Poachers were often caught and punished by fines. He had, therefore, taken precautions, and had formed a sort of Poachers' Union, which, by joint contributions, paid their fines from the funds ! It was a profitable form of insurance !

In 1899, shortly after the Government had blundered into the shameful war of appropriation in South Africa, a very big step was taken to knit up Labour interests, with the object of forming a Parliamentary Labour Party. At the Trade Union Congress of that year a resolution, drawn up no doubt by Keir Hardie, was worded as follows : 1899

> " This Congress . . . hereby instructs the Parliamentary Committee to invite the co-operation of all Co-operative, Socialistic, Trade Union and other working-class organisations jointly to co-operate on lines mutually agreed upon,

> in convening a special Congress of representatives from such of the above-named organisations as may be willing to take part to devise ways and means for the securing of an increased number of Labour Members in the next Parliament . . ."

The resolution was carried by a bare majority, and thereby changed political history.

A committee was immediately formed to put the idea into practice. This committee included, among others, Ramsay MacDonald, G. B. Shaw and Keir Hardie.

In February, 1900, I was present at a meeting in London when over a hundred delegates gathered, representing all shades of Labour opinion.

One of the I.L.P. representatives whom I had not previously met was the late Philip Snowden.

An ex school-teacher and Exciseman, he had fallen off his bicycle one day while riding to work, and had injured his spine so badly that doctors said he would never walk again. He was then an ardent Liberal, and employed his time while confined to bed by his injury in reading Socialist books to discover better how to combat their teachings. Instead, he was converted to uncompromising Socialism. His angry, dominant spirit miraculously overcame his bodily injuries ; and almost as soon as he could hobble about again on two sticks he became an active Labour agent.

1900 James Ramsay MacDonald, who had helped to convene the London meeting, was at that time almost unknown. I certainly did not dream, then, how much we two would be thrown together by later political events.

He was elected Secretary of the body then known as the Labour Representation Committee. A story is told that most of the votes which went to elect him were given because the delegates confused him with a James Macdonald, a stalwart member of the Social Democratic Federation.

I do not believe there was any confusion except perhaps in the minds of a very few, and Ramsay MacDonald was duly elected Secretary. A resolution on class war lines proposed by James Macdonald was deemed at that time to be too far-reaching and strongly worded for general acceptance by any considerable number of organised workers.

This view was recognised, among others, by Keir Hardie, who proposed the following amendment:

> "That this Conference is in favour of establishing a distinct Labour Group in Parliament, who shall have their own Whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to co-operate with any Party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the direct interests of Labour, and be equally ready to associate themselves with any Party in opposing measures having an opposite tendency."

That amendment was carried by 59 votes to 35, as a declaration of policy. Many delegates abstained from voting on the ground that they had received no instruction from their various societies.

The class war idea was in disfavour, for Liberal and Conservative ideas dominated the minds of millions of wage-earners belonging to the large Trade Unions.

I was very soon elected to serve on the Executive of 1900 the new Labour Party. I was chosen to represent the Trades Councils, being then Secretary of one of the largest in the country. A few years later I was asked to be one of the representatives of the Trade Union group on the Executive, and have continued to take part in that work without a break ever since.

It makes a notable contrast to set down what are now the objects of the Labour Party by the side of the timid terms in the resolution passed on the motion of Keir Hardie, already quoted. They are:

> NATIONAL: "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.

> "Generally to promote the Political, Social and Economic Emancipation of the People, and more particularly of those who depend directly upon their own exertions by hand or by brain for the means of life."
>
> Inter-Dominion: "To co-operate with the Labour and Socialist organisations in the Dominions and the Dependencies with a view to promoting the purposes of the Party, and to take common action for the promotion of a higher standard of social and economic life for the working population of the respective countries."
>
> Inter-National: "To co-operate with the Labour and Socialist organisations in other countries and to assist in organising a Federation of Nations for the Maintenance of Freedom and Peace, for the establishment of suitable machinery for the adjustment and settlement of International disputes by Conciliation or Judicial Arbitration, and for such International legislation as may be possible."

1900 I have no idea what would have been the reaction in Britain in 1900 had such a programme been announced then. At best, we should have been laughed out of political existence. At worst, we should have been gaoled as dangerous lunatics.

Now our aims are accepted and supported by millions of the electorate, and it is only a question of time before they are all put into effect.

Ramsay MacDonald learned his politics, like many others of us, in the hard school of experience. Son of a poor farm labourer, he came to London at the age of nineteen to take a job as an invoice clerk, at a wage of 12s. 6d. a week. Later this was raised to 15s. a week. He himself has written since:

> "That year was a great triumph for me. I not only lived on 15s. a week, and clothed and fed myself, but I also paid certain college fees at the Birkbeck, the Highbury Institute, the City of London College, etc., and I saved enough money to go home for a holiday in the north of Scotland. I solved the problem of how to live on 6d. or 7d. a day. Such luxuries as tea and coffee were

> beyond me, but I soon found that hot water was every bit as good as tea as a food, and it is quite as palatable, once you get used to it."

From such beginnings rose the man who was later to become Prime Minister of the most powerful nation in the world, of his fall (for such it has been) I shall write later.

The Committee to which he was appointed Secretary in 1900 paid him £25 a year for his services, and for the first four years he received no other money whatever.

At about the same time Philip Snowden was editing a weekly Labour paper, writing nearly the whole of it himself, and arranging for the distribution of about five thousand copies weekly, for all of which he received a salary of 8s. a week !

Yet, even in those days, our opponents used to say that we were in politics because we were making money by being there !

Labour gatherings then were rather prone to form committees and to invoke congresses without achieving any very definite results. Usually new movements of the sort had a precarious and doubtful existence.

But MacDonald's undoubted genius for organisation, and his wife's indomitable personality, laid the foundations of the Labour Party as we know it to-day, from 1900
the plans originally drawn up by the Labour Representation Committee.

MacDonald's home in Lincoln's Inn Fields became a gathering-ground for all the rising figures in the Labour world.

I suppose we shall never know how much we owe to the gentle presiding genius of that place, Margaret MacDonald. The touch of her guiding hand can be clearly seen in the early careers not only of her husband but of many of his associates of those days, who later rose to great political fame with him.

She died young, long before even the most rash prophet could have seen in her husband the first Labour Premier of Great Britain. When MacDonald's turn came, all of us grieved to think that his wise comrade could not go to No. 10 with him.

The new Labour Representation Committee was given a severe test very soon after its formation. Having involved the country in the South African War at the barefaced behest of a clique of British business men, the Government first wasted soldiers' lives by conducting the struggle with incredible incompetence, and then, having muddled through to what looked like the eve of victory by 1900, decided to go to the country with an hysterical jingoistic appeal for votes. Thus was engineered the infamous " khaki election " of that year.

MacDonald's own fierce opposition to this war cost him his membership of the Fabian Society and, later, ruined his chance of winning a Parliamentary election contest in Leicester in 1900.

In this General Election campaign his new Committee
1900 placed fifteen Labour candidates in the field. After one of the most shameful election campaigns in our history, all were defeated except two—Keir Hardie and Richard Bell. Hardie was the only Independent Labour member to be returned; he used to describe himself as the " United Labour Party " !

During the election campaign Labour speakers were stoned and mobbed, their houses and offices were wrecked, one clergyman who preached Labour views was driven from his parish, and all these things were gloated over by the very public authorities who were employed to keep the peace.

David Lloyd George, already a rising political figure, bitterly opposed this South African War, and publicly swore that if ever Britain took up arms again, he would resign from political life. He held a meeting in Birmingham, home town of Joseph Chamberlain, and savagely attacked him before Chamberlain's own electorate.

A riot ensued in which two men were killed. Lloyd George nearly lost his own life, and was smuggled through roaring crowds by being dressed in a policeman's uniform.

During this "khaki election" Keir Hardie made history by contesting two seats simultaneously—Preston, where I was with him, and Merthyr. He was returned for Merthyr. Even his grey hairs did not save him from most brutal ill-treatment during the election campaign.

The death of Queen Victoria early in 1901 seemed to 1901
foreshadow a complete change in the British Constitution. One doubts whether she could ever have tolerated a Labour Government. King Edward VII was less uncompromising; George V gave his wisdom and experience to the new situation when his people sent us to Westminster in office; and George VI is admittedly a democratic monarch, who has inspected poverty at close quarters, and is known to feel the urgent need for reforms for the benefit of the more unhappy of his subjects.

Queen Victoria had seen amazing changes take place in England during her reign. The population had doubled; the wealth of the country had increased threefold; its trade had spread in many new ways, and the British trade returns had increased sixfold. Paupers and criminals had been halved in numbers. The population of Australia had increased from about 150,000 to 5,000,000; British power had vastly increased in Canada, Africa and India. When she died, one-quarter of the earth's surface was ruled by her, and one-fifth of the world's population called her Queen or Empress.

Steamships and railways had become practical realities instead of theoretical experiments. Electricity and telegraphs had been commercialised. England had become the first industrial country in the world.

All these changes had brought in their train correspondingly enormous changes in the outlook and necessities of the British working man. Queen Victoria's reign, because of the industrial transformations which it brought, presented to this country a miraculous opportunity simultaneously to introduce State ownership. Unhappily enough that opportunity was cast aside in an unparalleled scramble of private greed. Vast fortunes were made, indeed, but they were scraped with miserly fingers into bulging private pockets.

A system of human exploitation was developed by taking advantage of the ignorance of the masses, which history will presently record with incredulous disgust. What might have been the dawn of the Golden Age, with wide education, world peace and universal happiness, was smirched and tainted by the envious selfishness of men with the Midas touch.

To champion oppressed humanity against them, and to teach them that gold cannot be eaten or drunk or turned into happiness, the Labour Party was evolved. It was of all the productions of the Victorian era most un-Victorian—a living proof that every evil produces its own remedy.

Whether capital interests in England recognised, in the accession of Edward VII, a risk of more clement consideration of the people's rights, one cannot say, but within a few months of the Queen's death a particularly unscrupulous endeavour was made to strike a death-blow at Trade Unions, and through them at organised labour.

Early in 1901 the Taff Vale Railway Company sued the Railwaymen's Union for fantastic damages because of the action of Union men in a trade dispute. After a case, which was conducted on lines which amazed every Labour man in the country, the House of Lords gave a final decision against the Union, which was mulcted of £23,000 damages, and incurred expenses amounting to a further £19,000.

1901 Other capitalists were not slow to realise the significance of this judgment! Trade Unions were sued on the most absurd grounds; the Taff Vale decision was quoted as a precedent; and Labour lost action after action.

It seemed, for a time, as if workers had lost the legal right to combine in their own defence.

But a totally unexpected result was also noticed. What the Trade Unions temporarily lost, the newly formed and struggling Labour Party gained. Hundreds of thousands of new members put their weight behind the endeavour to gain proper Labour representation in Parliament.

I believe that had there not been a Labour Party in 1901, to which angry workmen could flock, the Taff Vale blow at the justice they claimed might have caused them to strike a counter-blow by proclaiming a state of open revolution throughout the big industrial centres of England.

The increasing strength of the growing Labour giant brought such pressure to bear in 1906 that the Taff Vale decision was completely negatived. Meanwhile, however, many capitalists and employers of the die-hard type were congratulating each other in the belief that the cause of justice and equity had been crushed, and that the position of those who wanted to convert workmen's blood into gold had been made secure from further attack.

Among those of us who were working for Labour the first sensation of dismay caused by the Taff Vale affair was speedily forgotten. Much of our work that had taken so many years to build up was broken down by this single staggering blow; but we had been brought up on staggering blows and throve on the diet. We got our coats off and started to repair the damage; and with every intention of making the edifice a thousand times more formidable than before.

1901 My part of the task still lay in Oldham, where the Labour supporters were comparatively few, but were terribly in earnest. We decided, as a gesture to triumphant capitalism, to contest every ward in the borough in the forthcoming Town Council elections.

There were eight wards, and unhappily we had, in 1901, not enough men available who could spare the time to enter the contest. But we managed to put forward four candidates, of whom I was one. I contested the Waterhead Ward, and received a very sound drubbing.

None of us had expected to win, and none of us did so. We were content for the time with "moral victories."

In the following year I contested the St. Mary's Ward, and was beaten again, by a much smaller margin. In 1903 I fought the Clarksfield Ward, against the leader of the local Conservative Party. He was a most popular and accomplished man, and everyone laughed at the idea of a Labour candidate daring to oppose him.

1903 However, in the event I polled only a few votes less than he did, which gave him and his supporters something of a shock.

From that day Labour ceased to be a joke in Oldham Council elections. We were very patient, and we gained our reward. In time a Labour majority controlled the Council that had once scoffed at the idea of a single Labour member gaining a seat. A Labour majority has since ruled there, and I am proud of a little pioneer work to that end.

I did not enter the contest a fourth time, despite the bright hopes that the 1903 results held out, for my work was taking me more and more to Manchester. It was already foreshadowed that I should soon be asked to contest a division of that city in a Parliamentary election; and I could not give adequate time to both Manchester and Oldham. But there were plenty of men of my own persuasion in the smoky town of my birth to take up the Labour standard there where I had set it down, and carry it further forward yet.

In 1901 Winston Churchill was a Conservative candidate in a Parliamentary by-election in Oldham. He was somewhat mistrusted by certain elements in the town, partly because of the old story that he had broken his parole, and he was under the political wing of James Mawdsley, a so-called "Conservative working man's leader," who was immensely popular at the time in Oldham. It was hoped that Mawdsley's personality would drag Churchill into safety.

The reverse happened. Mawdsley lost, and, to everyone's surprise, Churchill was elected.

I met Churchill during his Election campaign, having been chosen to lead a group of local Labour supporters to interview him, and obtain from him an exposition of his views on certain Labour topics.

I found him a man of extraordinarily independent mind, and great courage. He absolutely refused to yield to our persuasions, and said bluntly that he would rather lose votes than abandon his convictions. 1901

It was unusual to find a candidate so outspoken, and his frankness appealed more to some of the members of our deputation than if he had hedged and been more tactful and compliant.

Churchill was, and has always remained, a soldier in mufti. He possesses inborn militaristic qualities, and is intensely proud of his descent from Marlborough. He cannot visualise Britain without an Empire, or the Empire without wars of acquisition and defence. A hundred years ago he might profoundly have affected the shaping of our country's history. Now, the impulses of peace and internationalism, and the education and equality of the working classes, leave him unmoved except on rare occasions.

Chapter VII

1896–1906—The shadow of Labour across the floor—I am invited to contest a by-election—Will Crooks—Fred Bramley—Some Labour women—Avoiding prison—General Election, 1906—What Labour offered—I contest Manchester North-East—Kicking off with Winston Churchill—Joe Toole—The price of victory—The Liberals try to absorb us—Organising at Westminster.

1900 The opening years of the twentieth century ushered in the beginning of a new era throughout the world. The hand of God was turning over a new page in human progress.

Hitherto, through all the ages, the people of the world had been divided into two classes—the powerful rich and the impotent poor. In each succeeding civilisation it was the same. Slavery, long abolished in name, was still practised in effect in 1900, under the name of industrial necessity.

But the classes, hitherto as separate as oil and water, were beginning to mingle when the twentieth century began. The upper classes were beginning to wonder whether, after all, the term "gentleman" applied exclusively to themselves; the lower orders fumbled with a revolutionary comprehension that perhaps they might some day share the good things their labour brought into being.

This movement of thought was strongly reflected in England.

In politics Labour men contested by-elections with a persistency in no wise discouraged by their constant failures. We still described our defeats as moral victories!

During the next two or three years David Shackleton and Will Crooks were sent to Westminster in Labour interests.

Already, the shadow of Labour lay across the floor of the House of Commons.

Meanwhile, I was engaged principally in Trade Union work in Lancashire. I spent a great deal of time speaking on Labour platforms, and wrote prolifically for Socialist papers, particularly *The Clarion*. My district organisation of the Union grew in numbers at a rate which surprised and satisfied me; but the more rapid the increase the more organising work I had to do. It was only spade work, but it kept me busy twelve and fourteen hours a day, often for seven days a week.

In 1904 a movement was afoot to make me a magistrate for Oldham. A very large number of Socialists and Labour men are magistrates to-day. Thirty odd years ago it was impossible to get a Socialist appointed. 1904

A few Trade Union leaders who were Liberals or Conservatives had been made magistrates, but it was not easy to gain a hearing for the claims of men connected with the new Party.

My friends, however, were in earnest. Memorials were sent to the Chancellor of the Duchy. Meetings were held. Resolutions were passed, and demonstrations uttered their protests against exclusion. In due time my appointment was made, and so small a thing was then regarded as a considerable triumph.

It was in 1904, too, that I was first invited to contest a Parliamentary by-election. Already it had become obvious to me that the only effective way in which Labour could control and improve conditions for the working classes was by going to Westminster, but I had not expected that I should so speedily be given an opportunity to go there myself.

I was by no means certain that I had had enough experience to act as an adequate representative in Parliament, and in the end, after many hours of serious thought, I withdrew in favour of an older Trade Union colleague, Mr. Sexton, who later became Sir James

Sexton, M.P. for St. Helens. It was not easy to abandon what seemed a glittering opportunity, but I preferred to support Sexton, who through life has carried a fine record of faithful service.

1904 Our candidate polled a few hundred votes, and after the poll was declared he marched with many of his supporters to the local market-place, where speeches were made, and where the crowd sang "England, arise! The long, long night is over."

It was out of this contest that Mr. Sexton used to tell one of his most diverting stories. It was common in those days for Socialist speakers to explain the waste of a competitive system, and to show how, instead of using money, it would be possible to effect great savings by changing goods for goods. During his campaign he dwelt at length on this theme. At one meeting a man asked a question. He explained that he was a tripe dresser (loud laughter), "and," he added, "supposing I want to go to London, have I to go to the booking-clerk's window and chuck in so many yards of tripe for a ticket?"

Uproarious laughter smothered the reply and put an end to any further efforts to explain the new method of exchange.

In May, 1903, the political world had been convulsed by Joseph Chamberlain's declaration in favour of Colonial Preference. This, the new Labour Party began systematically to oppose. MacDonald, Snowden and others issued pamphlets showing why we believed that Free Trade was essential to our continued national welfare.

I remember hearing this question discussed at Labour conferences and meetings with the utmost acerbity. Not all our supporters were prepared to accept the headquarters' views on the matter. Indeed, this independence of personal opinion has caused Labour upheavals on many occasions throughout our history, in contrast to the behaviour of certain famous supporters of other Parties, who seem to resemble boa-constrictors in that they can swallow without difficulty doctrines which have suddenly become official for them, but which, a few days or months

FRED BRAMLEY

earlier, would have been rejected by them as being absolutely unpalatable.

It was during the same year that Will Crooks won Woolwich for Labour, in a Parliamentary by-election. Crooks had a tremendous power of appeal, especially to any crowd in the neighbourhood of London. He combined the inspiration of a great evangelist with such a stock of comic stories, generally related as personal experiences, that his audience alternated between tears of sympathy and tears of laughter.

I know of no stage comedian who can move his audience to-day to such roars of merriment as could Will Crooks, when he related the human incidents that formed so valuable a part of his platform stock.

He had a crude strength in phrasing, too, which appealed directly to his workmen hearers. I once heard him say that a non-Union workman who tried to gain personal advancement at the expense of his mates was like a man who stole a wreath from his neighbour's grave and won a prize with it at a flower show!

In striking contrast to this genial gospeller of Labour was another stalwart of those early days, Fred Bramley. He was notable for his earnestness, and the polished clarity of his appeals. Later on when he became Secretary of the T.U.C., his time was notable for the improvement in working relations which he effected between the T.U.C. and the Labour Party.

The opening years of this century bear witness, not 1904 only to the men who helped to guard and feed the infant Labour, but to the increasing number of gifted and devoted women who also served.

Enid Stacey, Mrs. Pankhurst, Mrs. Bruce Glasier, Margaret MacDonald, Margaret Bondfield, Caroline Martyn, Marion Philips and Mrs. Snowden (as she then was) were among the pioneers whose names are best remembered to-day.

I recall an occasion when Mrs. Pankhurst's courage and growing fame saved me from a term of imprisonment!

Labour speakers had found what seemed to be an ideal pitch for open-air meetings, in a sort of park outside Manchester. This place was known by the picturesque name of Boggart Hole Clough. Boggart means ghost; but I never met any ghosts there, not even the ghost of the conscience of the Manchester Corporation, who tried by very unfair means to stop our meetings.

Being Tory in sympathy they did not care for Labour to have such an advantageous platform, so the authorities announced that we were "committing a trespass" by holding the meetings, and that anyone who spoke there in future would be arrested and imprisoned. The excuse of the trespass was a very transparent one, as a right of way ran through the Clough, and was in common use.

We became as determined as the Corporation. The hint of trouble caused hundreds more people to flock to the meetings, which were held every Sunday.

1904 Six of us pledged ourselves to defy the Corporation and test our right to hold meetings. The first speaker was arrested and sent to prison for one month. The second one, who spoke the following week, met the same fate.

The third was Mrs. Pankhurst. The authorities were frightened to arrest so notable a woman, and her monster meeting passed off without official notice. I was the fourth and spoke the following week, making a vigorous protest against the imprisonment of my colleagues; but having let Mrs. Pankhurst go free, I suppose they did not care to arrest me either. So officialdom looked the other way, the right of free speech was vindicated, and a woman had kept Clynes out of prison. I have often stood before her monument close to the House of Lords.

Except for isolated protests of this kind, the work of Labour in the first few years of the twentieth century did not produce any great effects on the surface of politics. Parliament went on as before, ignoring the needs of the greater part of the population; and many people thought that voices, like that of Keir Hardie, "crying in the wilderness," would die away if they were ignored for long enough.

Actually, however, though our work was not obvious, it was as effective as that of sappers steadily tunnelling their way into a doomed fortress. Behind us were Labour's storm-troops, waiting for another General Election, and glad that the Tory and Liberal garrison at Westminster had relaxed its watchfulness.

In 1905 an event took place, small in itself, which was to bring great results later. While a Labour Conference was sitting at Liverpool news arrived in England of the fiendish massacre of unarmed Russian workers who were awaiting the result of a petition before the Tsar's Winter Palace.

A fund was immediately raised for the relief of the dependents of the men who had been thus brutally cut down by the Tsar's Cossacks. This fund amounted to £1,000. It was acknowledged by Russian working class leaders, among them Vladimir Oulianoff, who wrote: "This generous assistance has put forward by ten years the eventual freeing of the Russian people." 1905

Later, when he had changed his name to Lenin, and had successfully led the Russian Revolution which destroyed the Tsarist regime, he endorsed his words by saying that, but for British assistance in 1905 that Revolution would have been much longer delayed.

In 1906 England had to face a General Election. The Tories had held power for over twenty consecutive years; but now Joseph Chamberlain's new Colonial Preference policy had disgusted the country as a whole; and we of the nascent Labour Party were out to contest every seat where we stood any chance of putting up a good fight.

We offered something quite different from the promises of the existing two Parties. We were out with a spiritual appeal, as well as to win material concessions. We urged that man did not live by bread alone. We wanted more than wages. We demanded a share for all in freedom and beauty, and a system of life that should be organised, not left to the accidents of birth and environment.

Instead of slums created by sweated employment and insanitary housing, we pictured towns that answered to the conception of Whitman's "Great City":

"Where the city of the faithfullest friends stands;
Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands;
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands;
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands—
There the Great City stands."

Capitalism, we declared, had been proved a failure for all but a few. The vast majority of Englishmen were then without property or security. Even in employment they had no safety; they worked on terms enforced by their employers, and were at the mercy of any whim of injustice or dislike.

Millions of people were subsisting almost at starvation level.

We offered no opposition to Capital. Our fight was against the Capitalist, as the personal embodiment of a greedy system which had failed. We advocated a very large number of small holders of capital, rather than a small number of protected and large holders of capital.

In 1906 it was already perfectly clear that Britain must produce in great quantities a variety of goods to send abroad, in order to bring back in abundance and good quality the foods and necessities on which we depended.

1906 However desirable it was to cultivate the soil and produce more food at home, the influences which have made us an industrial nation were too powerful to be ignored. The people of a nation which already had ambitions to become the world's workshop could not easily have been persuaded to go "back to the land."

Nor was it necessary. Certain people still take fright at the thought that we do not grow enough food to support us for long if outside supplies were cut off. But there is nothing to worry about in that! Every shopkeeper is in the same position; and he does not abandon the counter in order to grow potatoes in the back yard. The principle of independent support, went out for us when the industrial age superseded the era of agriculture.

In the years of spade work that went before the 1906 Labour General Election campaign, we were crippled by lack of funds. We had no money wherewith to send gifts to the poor, as the Tories and Liberals did ; and it was not easy to make loyal workmen see that they were serving their class better by sending their own representatives to Westminster than by giving their votes to the men who distributed bread and blankets to them in the winter months.

We had no social allurements to offer. It had not been our fortune to be sent to public schools and universities, and we lacked the graces and advantages possessed by our aristocratic opponents. But we had been brought into personal contact with the real forces of life, with the conditions of labour, with the circumstances under which great fortunes are made never to be enjoyed by those who made them but to be employed in the sending of rich children to public schools. We had learned facts totally unknown to those whose progress from university to Parliament had been, before the 1906 election, so easy as to be almost automatic.

Since I had withdrawn in favour of James Sexton I had received other invitations to stand for Parliament, but the pressure of my Union work was such that I was obliged always to refuse.

During 1905, however, without a word of warning, I 1905
found myself waited upon one day in Oldham by a deputation from the electors of the Manchester North-East Division, headed by Councillor Tom Fox of the City Council. He later became Lord Mayor of Manchester. In sincere and forceful terms they begged me to stand for them as a Labour candidate.

I objected that it would be very difficult to get together the money necessary for an election campaign, and that there was an entire absence of any established election machinery.

" Damn the money, and the organisation ! " replied

Tom Fox. "It's *you* we want; trust us to manage the rest!"

It was one of the great moments of my life when I heard those words, so eagerly spoken; there was nothing left for me to do but accept, and go into the fight with a good heart.

The Manchester division for which I had been invited to stand had always been Tory. Not long previously Mr. Augustine Birrell, the famous Liberal, had suffered a crushing defeat there from the member whom I now in my turn had to oppose—Sir James Fergusson, a Cabinet Minister in the Conservative Government.

We had no money or organisation, no committee-rooms, and few of us had any experience of Parliamentary election methods. My opponent was not only well blessed with all these advantages, but he had represented the constituency for twenty-one years. In and out of Parliament everyone respected and admired him; and, in an election when all the Labour candidates could not say as much, I found a scrupulous fairness in the fighting methods employed against me.

1905 I went to Manchester, and we established a primitive organisation, which, however, immediately began to get through a great volume of valuable work. We had faith; we had unbounded enthusiasm; we felt that we were in the right. When the traditional aids to electioneering were beyond our reach, as they mostly were, we invented cheap substitutes, or else simply "went without."

Our greatest inspiration was in the sincerity of the humble working men and women who espoused my cause. Workers came in hundreds from surrounding towns, not merely at their own expense but at the forfeiture of their wages, and not only on election day but for the week or two that preceded it. Yet not a single celebrated speaker graced my platforms, while my opponent was able to enlist the best political talent on his side.

The engaging innocence of some workmen as to public speaking is shown by an enquiry put to me at this time.

I had been addressing a large public meeting, and when the applause died away I walked to the station with a local friend. He was eager to become a speaker in my cause. He said quite simply that he would like to ask me a question.

" Can you tell me, Mr. Clynes, how I may become eloquent ? "

Eloquent ! Lord !

The Labour cause throughout Britain was assisted at this time by the very methods which opposed it. Many of our meetings were brutally upset. The basic fairness of the British character then caused a turnover in votes in our favour, as a practical protest against attempts to curb free speech.

Even in Manchester this effect was felt, not because of anything done by Sir James Fergusson, but through the actions of persons such as those who had tried to suppress our meetings at Boggart Hole Clough.

When I look back at that election fight in Manchester, I am astounded that we won through, so crippled were our means.

On one occasion two popular local speakers had been addressing meetings on my behalf, and my election agent and I were walking back to the station with them afterwards. My agent asked one of them what had been his expenses. He answered that the fare to Manchester was only a small amount—1s. 4d. 1906

" I'm not going to let you go away like that ! " said the agent, and thrust a two-shilling piece into his palm.

Think of a General Election speaker getting two shillings nowadays !

An amusing memory of my campaign in Manchester comes back to me. Manchester United Football Club, then a comparatively young team, asked Mr. Winston Churchill and myself to kick off for them in a big match. I kicked off at the start, on behalf of the United ; and Mr. Churchill did the same after half-time for their opponents.

After a desperate struggle, and some very good football, the United won the game, which I took as a lucky omen.

At the time Mr. Churchill was standing as Liberal candidate for another division of Manchester. He had formerly been a strong Conservative, but had abandoned his old interests when Joseph Chamberlain advocated Empire Protection tariffs. Later still, he returned again within the Conservative fold.

Another interesting character, and a very able man, with whom I came into contact during this election campaign was Joe Toole, who has ever since been numbered among my closest friends.

He started his career as a newspaper boy in Manchester. By the time this book is published he will be Lord Mayor of the city. His rise has been as romantic as any story from the *Arabian Nights*, yet he has always remained unaffected and loyal to everyone he knew in the old days.

1906 As the polling day approached I began to wonder very much what sort of a result I should achieve. My contests in Town Council elections in my native town had taught me what a distance there is between the inspiring encouragements, handshakes and back-slapping of optimistic friends and the actual winning of a seat !

However, on the great day our forlorn hope became speedily less forlorn and more hopeful ; and as the hours passed steadily by there could be no doubt that the votes were turning themselves into something formidable—perhaps even a majority.

An hour or so before the count was finished I approached the massive door of the counting-room in the Manchester Town Hall. The handle of the door was held in the hand of a policeman large enough to be in true proportion with everything else.

" Well, an' what do *you* want 'ere, sir ? " he inquired majestically, evidently feeling that I should have little interest in the count.

" I just want to look in to see what my majority is ! " I said as calmly as I could.

"Certainly, sir, certainly!" he replied, in an altered tone. "Perhaps you'll allow me to be the first one to congratulate you, sir?"

We shook hands; and it proved later that my hoped-for majority was no vision but reality. When the counting was done I found that I had beaten the former Cabinet Minister by 5,386 votes to 2,954. His defeat shocked and astonished him, seeming to fall upon him like a heavy personal blow. But he was in the best sense one of Britain's gentlemen, and bore no malice. Some time later I received from one of his relatives a generous and helpful letter of congratulation, even though he did not agree with all my views.

1906 The effect of my victory on my supporters was to send then into wild transports of delight, which continued unabated all through the night, and only decreased when dawn drove them heavy-eyed to work or bed.

There was an unceasing spate of speeches, and a wild orgy of brass band music, which grew more and more powerful and discordant as the hours of revel passed. My right hand speedily became quite disabled, and soon my left one ached terribly, and the forearm felt as if it had swollen to twice its normal size.

Even when I dragged my tired feet home again the cheering and singing went on unchecked, and wove itself into the dreams that disturbed my few hours of heavy sleep.

The strenuousness of that terrific campaign was far exceeded by the ordeal of subsequent attendance at victory meetings, so that after a day or two I became almost nervous of facing the frenzied attentions of my elated supporters, who were no ladylike teacup politicians, but brawny miners and factory operatives, whose muscular hands exerted a grip like that of a vice, or smote one's back like thunderbolts.

The elation was not on my account alone. From all over the country reports were coming in that the despised Labour candidates were winning seats.

Five of us were in for various parts of London;

Labour victories were recorded from towns as far apart as Bolton, Newcastle, Bradford, Leicester, Leeds, Halifax, Norwich and Dundee. When the last results were published we found that we had won a stupendous victory.

In the previous Parliament Labour had been represented by 4 members; now, out of 50 candidates, we had 29 successful returns. We had polled a total of 323,195 votes, out of a total number of votes polled by all parties of 859,518.

Over one-third of the country's voters had supported us; not only had we formed a real Labour Party at last, inside the House of Commons, but we had shown that the time would come when Labour might hope for an actual majority of voting power.

1906 We had more than trebled our votes since the 1900 General Election.

Many of the men who won seats in that 1906 Parliament were to go on to Cabinet or other rank later, though it seemed a far cry to us at the time. The names of Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden, Arthur Henderson, Stephen Walsh, F. W. Jowett, and others, were to be writ large across the pages of British history in future years.

The scornful amusement with which "the red-tie agitators" had been considered before 1906 changed throughout England, and particularly at St. Stephen's, into an attitude of uneasy anticipation. Our 29 Members did not constitute any great menace in themselves as yet; but the fact that we had polled over a third of the total votes cast for the three Parties was as much a portent to many thinking politicians as is the whirr of a clock's machinery before it strikes.

All over the country the Tories had suffered crushing defeats, due to their approval of Chinese labour in South Africa and to Chamberlain's tariff policy. They returned only 158 Members. The Liberals, under Campbell-Bannerman, found themselves with a majority of 270 over the united forces of all other Parties; nevertheless, with the return of our 29 pioneers to Westminster the

Liberal death-knell had tolled out its first solemn stroke, and already some of the Liberals knew it.

In the March of 1906 a letter was circulated to all Labour supporters who were believed to have any Liberal leanings, in which a great effort was made to break the power of the rising Labour strength. This letter was signed by the Liberal agent for Westminster, and read : 1906

> " The opinion has been freely expressed to me by Liberal leaders (who have promised considerable financial support) that a separate organisation should be formed to represent the views of the Liberal-Labour Members of Parliament, and to secure a substantial increase in their numbers at the next General Election.
>
> " It is thought that a Labour Party *within* the Liberal Party will be a great source of strength to both, and I am requested to ask your views thereon as a Labour M.P.
>
> " Will you please be good enough to send me a reply, with suggestions, during the week, so that steps may be taken to call an early meeting."

Nothing came of the proposal. It was a temptation to accept aid from a Party that outnumbered its combined opponents at Westminster by two to one, and was obviously beginning a long term of political power. But we had not come so far along the rough road simply to be picked up in the Liberal carriage at this stage—and politically kidnapped !

Our programme, including nationalisation of great services and properties, could never have been made to coincide with Liberal views unless we had thrown our ideals overboard and been satisfied with moderate improvements and personal rewards.

So we secured a room at the House for Party use ; Whips were appointed, and proper assistance engaged. Keir Hardie was voted Chairman. The officers of the Party met every day, and the whole Party once each week, to discuss plans of campaign, select speakers for

Parliamentary debates and set up committees to deal with outstanding questions.

In common with a number of other new Labour members, I now found my Trade Union work rather a handicap. But it had to be done, and somehow we managed both it and our Parliamentary business, despite lack of funds, lack of experience, and inadequacy of organisation. Having to travel constantly between London and our various Union headquarters and offices, some of us found the financial problems very difficult indeed.

1906 Our Unions came to our assistance as well as they could, until a legal judgment, to which I shall refer more fully later, interfered. But even so there were certain Labour members who found, not that they were filling their pockets by being at Westminster, as certain of our enemies alleged, but that they were actually out of pocket month after month and year after year. These deficiencies had to be made up as best they could from journalism and other sources.

But the difficulties only spurred us on. We were used to them. We overcame them somehow, and set to work steadily to make our influence felt, not only at Westminster, but all over the land.

Chapter VIII

1906–1908—First experiences as an M.P.—Expenses at Westminster—Impressions of the House of Commons—Electing the Speaker—Impatient Labour men—The King's Speech—The Chamberlains—Mr. Balfour—Asquith—Birrell—Some maiden speeches—F. E. Smith—Labour pressure.

Within a very short time of my first election to Parliament, I discovered that my new elevation had its humorous side. 1906

The novelty of being addressed as M.P. lasted scarcely longer than the first delivery of letters after my victory. It was, I must admit, with rather a thrill that I saw beside my breakfast-plate a considerable heap of correspondence, all the envelopes of which bore the magic inscription. It was only when I discovered that these communications were not, as I had half hoped, requests to me to set my country on the path of prosperity and rectitude, but were rather appeals of a more mundane nature altogether, that I lost the savour of the occasion, and realised the great truth that very few letters are worth the price of cold bacon and coffee !

As a fact only one of the letters I received on my first day as an M.P. was a solicitation to undertake Parliamentary business. It was a request from a gentleman who claimed to be the owner of a famous estate in Aberdeenshire, worth about twenty million pounds, that I should lay his case before the Government, because the previous Government had, for its own purposes, defrauded the writer from obtaining his inheritance. It was only when I glanced at the address from which the epistle had been sent that I discovered that it was an appeal from an inmate of a well-known Scottish lunatic asylum.

My other correspondence that morning was largely composed of congratulations. But certain letters added a touch of variety here and there.

Several of the best London hotels, for instance, offered me accommodation while the House was in session. I was informed that I could live in modest luxury in the metropolis at a cost of a mere thirty or forty pounds a week.

This information, to a general labourer who knew the luxury of cleaning his own boots every morning, was both comforting and grateful.

A London tailor, too, solicited my custom, assuring me that I could purchase a good Parliamentary suit of clothes, suitable for wear among the most distinguished and lordly of my new Parliamentary opponents, for a sum of fifty or sixty sovereigns, spot cash. Apparently Labour Members were not granted credit.

1906 In this connection it is interesting to mention a subject of discussion that was engaging the M.P.s of all parties in 1906. This referred to the possibility of an official salary being paid to all Members, who, up to that time, had to meet expenses and lose working time elsewhere without recompense from the country whose business they were conducting. This, of course, was a great handicap to the Labour Party, as members of the other two parties were then mainly persons of other occupation besides that of politics, and were able to support themselves on independent incomes.

In the King's Speech in Commons in 1906 no reference was made to this question of payment for M.P.s. One at least of the new Members was greatly concerned at the omission. This was Mr. John Ward, the Navvies' Member, who at that time was in receipt of only 50s. a week, from which he provided for a wife and family, as well as paying his expenses at Westminster.

My own case was rather better. I made out at the time, by request, a table of expenses, which I will quote here ;

MR. J. R. CLYNES, M.P., IN 1906

	£	s.	d.
Bed and breakfast, per week	1	4	0
Other meals ,,		14	0
Fares in London ,,		3	0
Postages ,,		6	0
	£2	7	0

In addition I had to pay for clothes, travelling expenses between London and Manchester, and the support of my wife and family.

1906 When, as sometimes happened, I was kept in the House for divisions long after all trains and trams had ceased to run, I had to pay 7s. for a cab to take me home to the inexpensive outskirt of London where I was lodging, having chosen it because living was cheaper there than it was nearer to Westminster.

There were compensations, however, even to these difficulties. Most of the Members then in the House were apt to complain at the fare provided there. But we Labour men found it a fine thing at that time to be able to get a good slice from a well-cooked joint, with a variety of vegetables, pudding or fruit, and plenty of bread, for a shilling.

My first impressions of life as a Member of Parliament in February, 1906, were very mixed ones.

I recall constantly losing my way about in the amazing ramifications of the ancient building. Even now that I have been a Member for the better part of thirty years, I sometimes find myself in some part of the House that I have not visited for years, and doubt assails me for a moment as to which is the quickest way out of it!

On the first day of the sitting in 1906 the Labour Party took up a position on the first two benches below the gangway on the Opposition side. The Irish Members were immediately behind us, while the Tories sat above the gangway.

The first business enacted was the election of a Speaker. Mr. Lowther was re-elected in this office, and Sir Henry

Campbell-Bannerman, the new Prime Minister, offered him a congratulation on behalf of the House.

Mr. Speaker, of course, despite his quaint and ancient title, is the one Member who may under no circumstances address the House, except when correcting, guiding or informing the rest of the persons present. This high office can only be filled efficiently by a man of considerable attainments and great Parliamentary experience. The position demands unlimited patience, a complete absence of individual or Party passion, and a judgment so ripe as to enable application of it on the instant that any question has to be decided.

The Speaker has often to deal with the man who is passionately convinced that he is right when he is hopelessly in the wrong. In such a case a successful Speaker must exact instant submission, yet obtain it in such a way that the submission appears to be a graceful concession to age-old authority. Thus the Speaker wields enormous power ; his rule within the House is absolute, and the most scrupulous impartiality is therefore necessary to his office.

1906 During our first days in the House nearly all the new Labour Members of the 1906 Parliament were inclined to resent the cumbrous formalities imposed by the ceremonies of the place. We were burning with impatience to set the world to rights, and had not yet discovered that this gigantic task could not be completed as the result of a few sincere and somewhat hasty speeches.

The long, regal-sounding phrases from the Chair, the formalities imposed on Members, the tortuous indirectnesses surviving from more leisured days, the hours kept by the House, and its measured methods of business, all seemed to us to be deliberately designed to stifle our enthusiasm and smother our anxious efforts.

Since that distant day we have learned a lesson that has to be acquired by each succeeding generation of Members. Behind the cumbrous formalities of Parliament lies the wisdom of long experience. Flouting procedure in the Commons has never yet brought a cause nearer attainment, or a Member nearer fame.

I decided to learn the conventions as I went along. Many heavy tomes exist for the purpose of instructing M.P.s in procedure, but my experience has been that some of the dullest speakers I have ever heard have been the very ones who claimed to know more about the rules of the House than the Speaker himself.

I can think of only two items of procedure which seem useless. One is the occasional entry of Black Rod, who walks solemnly from the House of Lords, knocks thrice on the door of the House of Commons to crave admission, and proceeds to the Speaker's Chair, thus suspending all business while he commands the presence in the Lords of Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. This interruption is galling, but it is endured to illustrate the rights of the Commons. It is a point of substance if the next is not.

The second superfluity occurs when the Speaker leaves the Chair at the close of a sitting, and attendants and constables throughout the House shout in unison " Who goes home ? " This custom dates back to the time when footpads and highwaymen were a menace in London, and gentlemen leaving the House found it wiser to proceed in parties.

When the Speaker had been elected, two or three days were taken up in swearing-in the Members. I waited in a line with the other Labour men, and eventually stood before a great table and took the solemn oath of allegiance, finally signing my name in a book in which all such records were kept. 1906

When everyone had been sworn-in real business began. The Mace-Bearer and the Speaker entered the House, and after a solemn prayer for guidance (which is too often read to nearly empty benches), the King's Speech was made. This is, of course, a proclamation of intentions presented by the party in power.

The new Labour Members were disappointed that this speech contained no reference to the introduction of old-age pensions. At that time the country was spending over fourteen million pounds annually in maintaining a ponderous workhouse system. It cost us 8s. 5d. per head to maintain the inmates of such places ; Labour wished to press for a pension of 5s. a week at least to be paid to all needy persons over sixty-five years of age.

We were scoffed at then, but our plans soon afterwards came to fruition, and now the old-age pension, originally advocated by Labour men, has become a reality, to the lasting benefit of hundreds of thousands of poor people.

I was extremely interested in the ceremonial attaching to the King's Speech. This was the first time I had seen King Edward VII, and his regal bearing impressed me strangely, even though I knew quite well that the sounding sentiments which he read so impressively were merely the dictation of the Party momentarily in Parliamentary power. As I listened I wondered whether Labour would ever be able to dictate a policy in some future speech from the Throne, but I little dreamed that I would help in the shaping of such a policy less than twenty years later.

The processions, trumpets, gowns, glitter, plumes and jewels made a brave show at the opening of that distant Parliament, but it was mid-winter, and we Labour men had eyes also for the dejected figures that stood shivering on the brink of the crowds, lacking the common amenities of life, in tragic contrast to the magnificent and stately figures of the Lords, and the complacent sleekness of certain Members of the Commons.

1906 We were concerned, too, at the secret and tortuous foreign negotiations which were endorsed or foreshadowed in the King's Speech. Already they were bringing the risk of a Continental war nearer ; as yet, there seemed no hope of open diplomacy, such as Labour later instituted with such notable success.

We decided not to delay the subsequent proceedings more than could be helped during the early interminable debates, and to introduce matters of Labour interest, wherever possible, at a somewhat later date of the Parliament's history.

Speaking for myself, I was quite as much interested in the famous figures around me as in the somewhat formal questions and answers of the first week or two at Westminster.

Joseph Chamberlain was already breaking up. The lightning wit of former years was slower ; the forgiving smile with which he had been accustomed to turn on an opponent who interrupted him, prior to rending the heckler's arguments to shreds, had lost its old terrors. Already the cloak was falling on his sons, Austen and Neville.

Austen Chamberlain never greatly changed. He was always a stickler for attire, and his silk hat was a shining landmark then, when even a few Labour Members wore " toppers," and a famous Liberal began wearing a soft hat just as a mark of distinction.

Mr. Balfour was considered by most of us, at first, rather in the light of a lion whose claws had been cut. But our levity soon changed to admiration for a man who, by intuitive fighting instinct, re-formed the Members of a routed Party and gathered them once more into a powerful political force.

Mr. Asquith, silver-haired and silver-tongued, seemed the perfect lawyer, able to argue any case without passion or fault. In direct contrast was Winston Churchill, now a devoted Liberal, irresistible in argument, startling in metaphor, piercing in repartee ; a man to whom the House always wanted to listen, yet from whom it received disappointingly little as yet of practical value. A colleague once said of him in those days : " He ought to have been a cavalry officer ; he is only happy when executing a verbal ' Charge of the Light Brigade ! ' " 1906

Augustine Birrell, the distinguished Liberal who had formerly failed to capture the division of Manchester for which I was now sitting, was what one might term the Lloyd George of that day ; Ll. G. himself, though he was already a well-known figure at St. Stephen's, had not fully developed the sharp humour for which his speeches have since become so famous.

In his day Mr. Birrell could dart the rapier of his wit from side to side of the House, keeping everyone, even the victims, in roars of laughter, and giving us all an intellectual treat. I believe this very quality may have prevented him from rising to greater heights in politics. For I noticed then, while my perception of novelty in the House was still keen, that Members who made too many jokes were either put down as harmless jesters or else suspected as vitriolic cynics. Important work ceased to be expected from them ; they were invaluable as stop-gaps, but were not asked to undertake serious Party business. On the other hand, a great reputation for sagacity is often gained by saying little and preserving a sombre yet reliable demeanour. One very famous Conservative of post-War years is a case in point.

I have not the space to give my first impressions of all the famous men I saw in that first Parliament in which I sat. Campbell-Bannerman, John Burns, Lloyd George, Haldane, John Morley, Herbert Samuel, Runciman, McKenna and many others were there, who were later to become famous. No one knew, then, which of us the capricious goddess Fortune would touch with her golden wand, or which she would glance at and then pass by.

1906 One thing that made me feel bitter during my first months at St. Stephen's was the callousness shown by certain Members to the conditions of life among poor people. This attitude has now almost vanished, but one could sense it very strongly then.

Hundreds of the men then sitting contentedly on the benches had never done a day's hard work in their lives. They had never hungered. They could not see the viewpoint of those who had. Want, to them, was an unpleasant word, not a personal memory of an aching stomach, or a leaking roof, or a sick child for whom medical aid could not be afforded. They could "jest at scars, that never felt a wound"!

They had nothing but arrogant mistrust for us, who knew these things at first hand. Sometimes, when they waved aside our questions or refused us a hearing on some subject tragically important to us, it was hard for us to keep our tempers in restraint.

The first maiden speech on behalf of the new Labour

Party was made by little Stephen Walsh, who later became our Secretary of State for War. Never was little man better warrior! He spoke clearly, dispassionately and convincingly, with some quotations from Shakespeare and Milton which must have surprised those uncompromising Tory Members who had explained with some care that they supposed the new Labour M.P.s would rant instead of making speeches.

An effective maiden speech was made shortly afterwards by Philip Snowden, who later became the first Labour Chancellor of the Exchequer. He spoke on Tariffs and Free Trade, and received a very appreciative reception from everyone.

As he sat down Mr. F. E. Smith, then a Tory novitiate, rose to make one of the most-discussed maiden speeches in our Parliamentary history. This is an occasion on which most orators are uneasy; not so the future Lord Birkenhead. He spoke in defence of Tariff Reform, with the ironical confidence of a schoolmaster rebuking disorderly pupils.

When he had uttered a few polished sentences 1906
murmurs of appreciation began to punctuate his phrases. The murmurs from the Tory benches grew swiftly to cheering, and when he sat down, smiling complacently, there was a brief scene of wild enthusiasm. I do not remember hearing a maiden speech at any other time in my Parliamentary career that was so delightedly received. We all felt, who heard it, that this was a future celebrity in embryo.

But the same intolerant self-assurance that made this speech such a success was itself to rob F. E. Smith of the highest Parliamentary honours in later life. I was told that, at a political meeting much later on, at Southampton, Lord Birkenhead, as he then was, replied to some good-humoured Labour heckling by suddenly shouting: "Get back to your kennels, you dogs!" Fortunately for Britain, it has never been possible here to gain votes by arrogance, unassisted by understanding of the people whose votes are sought.

A statesman of equal assurance, but far more equanimity, was Lord Curzon of Kedleston. Some amusing tales have been told of him. A fellow-student at the University once idly composed a poem in his honour. It began:

> "My name is George Nathaniel Curzon—
> Really a most superior perzon . . ."

But he was invariably the personification of courtesy and correctitude, as well as being one of the most able diplomats of the century.

A story well indicating the difference in Birkenhead's personality also concerns his University career. It is said that when he left he owed certain debts to local tradesmen which he was temporarily unable to pay. The story runs that he called his creditors together, and asked them point-blank whether they would prefer to dun him there and then, and perhaps prejudice his future career, or whether they would wait for their money, plus a reasonable amount of interest, until he had become a rich and famous man. At the time, he had no prospects of becoming rich or famous, other than those usually possessed by a comparatively unknown student. It is an eloquent tribute to his powerful personality that he was apparently able to convince such creditors, who must often have heard similar hopes expressed, that their best policy was really to wait till the self-possessed young man before them had actually achieved celebrity!

1906 I did not make my own maiden speech in the House until I had spent several weeks there, watching and listening to other speakers. Then a bill was introduced to amend Workmen's Compensation Law.

This subject was one I had handled hundreds of times during my platform work as a Union official, and I was quite at my ease among the facts I had to present. But the consciousness that I was speaking to an audience of orators was somewhat trying, and I attempted no flights of eloquence or rhetoric, preferring to stick to indisputable figures and simple logic.

The speech was very kindly received, and I felt that

I had undergone quite happily an experience which is somewhat trying even to the most skilled speaker. Since that day I have usually felt at ease when I have been called upon to make a speech in the House.

The Workmen's Compensation Bill re-defined " workmen " to include some six million employees in factories, shops, offices, domestic employment and seafaring trades, and for the first time gave persons in these walks of life a reasonable safeguard against accidental injury in their work.

1907 During the first year or two of the new Parliament's life Labour influence began to be clearly felt. Apart from the Bill I have mentioned we brought pressure to bear to modify or shape the Old-Age Pensions Act, the Coal Mines (Hours) Act, the Trade Boards Act, the Labour Exchanges Act, the Education (Provision of Meals) Act, and many other important measures.

I have described elsewhere the unfair blow struck at organised Labour by the Taff Vale judgment, whereby Trade Union funds were in constant danger of being raided by capitalists on the ground that Trade Union employees had caused their employers loss through strikes.

This judgment was speedily rendered void as a precedent by the passing of the Trade Disputes Bill, which safeguarded Union funds once more, and legalised " peaceful persuasion " in strikes and lock-outs.

Most of the Acts I have referred to were actually introduced as Government measures ; the Old-Age Pensions Act, for example, was brought in by Mr. Lloyd George, and provided pensions for some half a million men and women over seventy years of age. But it was a well-recognised fact that the Liberals would never have supported these Bills in their final form, save for the pressure of Labour behind them, which made them fearful of losing their position as the professedly reformist Party in the House.

The approval of the electors was shown towards the Labour efforts when, within a year or two of the opening of Parliament, we won three further seats at by-elections.

Chapter IX

1908–1909—MacDonald's maiden speech—Work in the Commons—Land ownership—Campbell-Bannerman's death—Asquith plays "General Post"—Old Age Pensions—I meet trouble in the Commons—The Osborne judgment—Four dreadnoughts or eight?—Ll. G.'s 1909 Budget—Daylight Saving efforts—Lords *v.* Commons—Two General Elections.

One of the most important maiden speeches from the newly-elected Labour Members was that made by Ramsay MacDonald.

John Burns had made a fighting speech on the subject of unemployment, and when he sat down MacDonald rose. He spoke of his heart-rending experiences as a member of the Central Unemployment 1908 Bureau in London, and urged that the Government should do something more practical than endow farm colonies and set up distress committees, eleven of which, he pointed out, had taken no action whatever to provide public work for unemployed during the preceding year.

The impression he gave was that of a bitter and dour fighter, and his speech created an unusual amount of interest in the House.

Some of his uncompromising remarks in that speech reawakened the old personal attacks to which many of us in the Labour ranks had by that time become inured. Not only private individuals but also powerful newspapers slyly hinted that "the red-tie fanatics" believed in free love, or angrily denounced us as atheists. Even to-day some of the gravest of constitutionalists will assure you that modern Russia is a stronghold of both beliefs. In Edward VII's reign Prejudice used Labour M.P.s as whipping-boys.

A feature of the House of Commons which interested me deeply in my first years there was the variety and number of questions dealt with. At one hour the topic under discussion may affect some trivial affair in a distant village—perhaps about the delivery of letters or the width of a lane—and at another hour on the same day the loftiest questions of Empire life or world prosperity may be under consideration. Members swing their attention from the parish pump to a financial crisis, and, in either, one may at any time hear world-famous orators intensely engaged.

The complexity of subjects from which Parliament cannot escape has grown enormously in recent years. When I first sat in the house a long interval from work was common from about August to February. An Autumn Session then was a rarity. The rare thing now is not to have one.

During its first year or two in the House of Commons the new Labour Party was carefully feeling its way. This, however, did not prevent our Members from expressing their feelings forcibly on certain subjects. 1908

During the debates on the Education Bill we pointed out that there were at that time over 300,000 families in London alone who had to live on less than 20s. a week, and quoted a famous doctor as saying that more than sixteen per cent of London children lived in a constant state of semi-starvation. I wrote at the time in the *Oldham Chronicle* :

> " We must, at least, observe as good conditions for the rearing of children as the rich man gives to the breeding of his race-horses . . ."

and earned myself a good deal of unpleasant criticism as a result.

It was not, however, a time to mince words. I remember, during this debate, hearing John Ward, a

Labour M.P., tell how, on his way to St. Stephen's that day, he had met his own brother, starving and wretched because of his lack of employment, and because his children were crying for bread. The throb in Ward's voice as he spoke seemed to rob even the most arrogant Tories of their defiance, and I think few who heard this touching speech can ever have forgotten it.

On the burning subject of private ownership of land we also had something to say. A doggerel verse much in vogue at that time returns to me:

> "The crime is great in man or woman
> Who steals a goose from off a common;
> But who will plead the man's excuse
> Who steals the common from the goose?"

This verse was actually once quoted in the Commons, to the overpowering indignation of the occupants of certain benches!

There was serious cause for our bitter outlook. At that time less than five hundred nobles in Great Britain
1908 owned rather over one-fifth of the whole country, and their relations and friends held most of the rest. In many cases the original title to the land was simply that an ancestor had committed an indiscretion at the behest of a former king. Simultaneously three-quarters of the Transvaal was privately owned by seventeen rich men, to the extreme discomfort of the original inhabitants. Nor would these men allow their own kind to share the benefits of the place with them, preferring to import Chinese labour of a semi-slave description because of its cheapness.

The opening of the 1908 session of Parliament was of special interest to all Labour supporters. Keir Hardie announced his wish to retire from the Chairmanship of the Party, feeling that he could do better work unhampered by the restrictions that this official position imposed. The two likely candidates for future leadership were David Shackleton, a genial giant of moderate views, and Arthur Henderson. Henderson was eventually selected, and held the position for two further sessions.

Another detail of special interest to us was the promise in the King's Speech in 1908 that an Old-Age Pensions Bill should be speedily introduced. Thus one of the principal immediate objects of the Labour voters throughout the country seemed likely to be attained.

The Speech, however, did not seem to us to cover nearly all the vital questions of the time, and MacDonald moved an amendment to it regretting that no proposal was mooted therein to deal with unemployment, which was already becoming a serious national concern. The amendment was greeted in certain quarters as a sign of disloyalty and coming revolution—one can hardly imagine why!

Before that session had got into its stride all Parties in the House were to feel the loss of a great Parliamentarian. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal Prime Minister, submitted his resignation one day because of sudden ill-health; a fortnight later he was dead.

"C.-B." was a remarkable man. Appointed as 1908
Liberal leader when the Party fortunes had almost vanished, he built them up again by calm, patient, indomitable work, until his gentle and unflinching courage had its reward in a sweeping Liberal victory. He was deeply sensitive, a passionate lover of peace, a man of wide outlook and great understanding. He was not a brilliant orator, but the House always listened to him with respect and sympathy, simply because of his quiet sincerity.

When he resigned King Edward sent for Mr. Asquith, formerly Chancellor of the Exchequer, who thus began a long and important career as Premier. Asquith reconstructed the Ministry in a way that caused everyone considerable surprise.

Colonel Seely, whom everyone expected to be sent to the War Office, of which he had made a lifelong study, became Under-Secretary for the Colonies. Mr. Winston Churchill, the new Liberal recruit, who was specially suited for work at the Colonial Office, went to the Board of Trade. Dr. Macnamara possessed exceptional qualifications to join the Board of Education, instead of which he was sent to the Admiralty. Lloyd George succeeded his new chief as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It seemed at the time as though Asquith had played this remarkable " general post " with his Ministers so that each man should know so little of his new duties that the real control should be left to the Premier himself, and no brilliant rival should have the opportunity to arise within the Party. This idea gained credence because Asquith then held tenure of the leadership rather precariously, having antagonised a considerable section of Liberal opinion by some suspicious flirtations with Tory views, which at one time seemed likely to lead to a political elopement !

1908 The Budget Speech of 1908 contained the first practical suggestions for tackling the question of old-age pensions. Mr. Asquith, although not yet Chancellor of the Exchequer, had prepared the Budget, and introduced it to the House.

The Labour ranks were angry and disappointed at the nervousness of the pension proposals. Pensions were to be paid at the rate of 5s. a week to persons over seventy years of age who could prove that they had no other income exceeding 10s. a week. If two pensioners lived together they were to receive only 7s. 6d. between them.

So few people were expected to benefit under this scheme that Mr. Asquith only devoted a little over £1,000,000 to it. A Labour Member, in pleading that the age-limit should be reduced to sixty-five, pointed out, amid laughter, that, as the age of man was not expected to exceed the Biblical " three score and ten years," no one would draw the pension at all !

Like many other reforms mooted by the Labour Party, however, it had to wait many years before the power of a considerable Labour section in the Commons could force a more just shaping of its terms.

During the 1908 session I was entrusted with the task of introducing a motion for a general eight-hour working day, which was one of the dearest ambitions of the Labour Party. A good deal of Tory scorn was poured on the scheme by Members who had never done hard work at any time ; but from that date Labour worked incessantly towards the ideal of giving working men decent hours of leisure, and now the eight-hour day is too long !

In connection with this eight-hour day plan, I had an amusing encounter with one such gentleman as I have described.

A petition was sent in to a certain big employer in Lancashire for a slight advance in wages, and less strenuous hours of work. Some of my colleagues had the case in hand. I knew nothing of the petition, though my name was associated with it as the principal officer of the Union concerned. 1908

The employer was a Member of Parliament, and held Army rank. He was known as a martinet, and expected everyone to jump to it when he issued an order.

One day he stopped me in the House of Commons, and addressed me as if he had commanded my presence at a court-martial, and was now finding me guilty and issuing a reprimand and a sentence.

Several times I attempted to interrupt him in order to explain that I personally had had nothing to do with the claim made by his workmen, but each time he ordered me to be silent before I had spoken ! When his breath finally deserted him I explained moderately that the men had a legal right to act collectively through their Union, and suggested that the matter might be peacefully settled after discussion.

Peace and discussion were evidently words unknown in the heroic dictionary, for I was instantly and forcibly denounced for "interfering."

" I'll expose you, sir ! " he fumed. " Damme, sir, I'll go straight to your constituency and tell your electors that you're sowing discontent between me and my men, and causing them to risk instant dismissal. And how will you like *that*, may I ask, sir ? "

I said I should like it very well, and would be glad to accept his challenge and meet him in my constituency at any time that suited him. Muttering threats and abuse, he stamped angrily away.

I was delighted at the prospect of our coming meeting in Manchester, but after waiting for some time found that he had no intention of carrying out his promise. I therefore put a statement in writing and sent it to the Press, commenting on the discourtesy I had been shown, and asking him to meet me as he had threatened, at any one of three places and at any time that suited him.

I offered to appear with him on any platform in my constituency, or in his own, or at the town in which his works was situated and where " his " men would form the audience, at any kind of meeting he cared to convene.

The result was—silence !

1908 His workmen gradually became better organised, and with the aid of my Union they were able, in the end, to win for themselves fairer terms of employment. Their irascible employer later became a peer of the realm.

The year 1908 was a bitter one for the new Labour Party. Although we had entered the Commons in modest numbers, we found our influence there appallingly weak, and our fight against prejudice and greed tragically slow.

Meanwhile, working men all over the country were beginning to feel that nothing save direct action could save them from victimisation, and in their disappointment at not seeing greater results achieved by Labour Members, they cast themselves into a series of furious and widespread strikes. Lacking adequate organisation and funds, however, they did nothing but hurt themselves and strengthen the position of the victorious employers.

In July, 1908, a new and serious blow was struck at Labour ambitions. A Mr. W. V. Osborne, secretary of the Walthamstow branch of the Society of Railway Servants, started an action to restrain his Society from using its funds in assisting the return and maintenance of Labour M.P.s to Parliament. Several of the members of our Party in the House were by this time receiving yearly payments, mainly from Trade Union funds.

The case, dismissed by Mr. Justice Neville, was successful in the Court of Appeal. The Society then took it before the House of Lords, who gave their verdict in favour of Osborne and against the Unions.

This judgment was a deadly challenge to the Trade Union world. Almost immediately the enemies of Labour completed their victory by showing that local as well as Parliamentary representation was forbidden Trade Union assistance. Injunctions were obtained against twenty-three of the principal Unions, which put an immediate end to all their political work.

Despite continual efforts by Labour and some Liberal authorities, the Osborne Judgment was not remedied for four years, during which time every fair means and a good many unfair ones were employed by our enemies to turn this blow into a finishing stroke which should dismiss for ever the working man's ability to represent his own class in our so-called democratic Parliament. These four years were ones of great discomfort and poverty for certain Labour M.P.s.

1909

The 1909 session of Parliament opened amid considerable excitement from all Parties. It was obvious that the Government would receive great criticism in the forthcoming Budget ; and Lloyd George, as the new Chancellor of the Exchequer, possessed the sort of fighting personality that could be depended upon to meet attacks with vigour and skill.

The principal item of interest in the Budget was the allocation for new dreadnoughts for the Navy. By that time the armament manufacturers of Great Britain, who were well represented inside and outside Parliament, had sedulously worked up an hysterical terror of Germany, so that great sums of national revenue which might otherwise find its way to the relief of want and misery should be diverted instead into their pockets in the form of profit on the construction of engines of human destruction.

During the 1906 session, when this wicked agitation was being commenced, Campbell-Bannerman had made a scathing speech concerning it. He said :

> " Can any of us say that, as a result of our overwhelming sacrifices of money, of men, of ideals, and of civil dignity, a sense of security has been attained? Is it not evident that any process of simultaneous and progressive armament defeats its own avowed purpose? Scare answers to scare and force begets force, until at length it comes to be seen that we are racing one against another after a phantom security, which flees terrified at our armed approach."

How truly those words from the grave ring out to-day !

In 1908 Dr. Macnamara, himself at the Admiralty,
1909 stated that after three months study of the Naval Estimates he was " filled with despair at the dreadful rivalry which civilised people were inflicting on themselves. Everything was growing bigger, everything more expensive and more swiftly obsolete."

He pointed out that the *Victory* was forty years old at Trafalgar, and was in commission for some years afterwards. Yet in 1907 we sold for £26,500 a battleship, only sixteen years old, which had cost us £887,304. Between 1900 and 1908 we sold battleships for a total of £200,000 that had cost the tax-payers eight and a half million pounds !

I wonder what he would have said to the hundreds of millions of pounds wasted in this way in recent years.

Lloyd George's 1909 Budget provided for four new dreadnoughts, for which he proposed to pay by considerable increases in income-tax. Not so long previously statesmen of the calibre of Mr. Gladstone had promised that income-tax should be abolished. Now "Ll. G." was putting the tax over a shilling for the first time in our history, and so taking the initial step towards present taxes of close upon five shillings in the pound. Nor will it stop there, if the present-day war scares are listened to so eagerly, and private profiteers permitted to charge up to a hundred per cent above production costs on war material.

Death duties, stamp duties, petrol tax and land taxes were all to contribute towards the incomes of the pre-war armament kings. Half-way through his Budget speech the Chancellor lost his voice; and the hum in Commons during the half-hour's adjournment while he was finding it again was reminiscent of a disturbed beehive. Everyone was discussing the sensational new Budget.

The most feverish point of debate was the question of the Navy Estimates. A propaganda campaign was being carefully worked up to demand not four but eight new dreadnoughts! The topic invaded the music-hall stage, and popular songs were parodied to treat of the "Four or Eight" controversy. 1909

Mr. Asquith, the Premier, raised his voice against the war-mongers. He said in the Commons:

> "At the end of this year there will be seven British dreadnoughts commissioned and capable of taking their part with the British Fleet. How does Germany stand? At this moment she has not got a dreadnought in commission at all! At the end of this year we shall have in commission dreadnoughts with a displacement of 125,000 tons, and carrying sixty-four 12-inch guns, as against Germany's two dreadnoughts with a displacement of 36,000 tons and carrying twenty-four 11-inch guns. And we have thirty-five armoured cruisers now, against Germany's eight."

He went on to show that, as far ahead as 1912, we should have nearly double the power of Germany on the high seas.

During the same debates Mr. McKenna said :

> " The trend of our diplomacy, which has had the effect of seeming to isolate Germany, our Press and platform propaganda, and our swagger on securing dreadnoughts have produced the only result which could be expected, viz. a bigger German Navy. We must therefore make ours bigger still, and hope that Germany will feel exhausted before we do."

The plain fact was, that in 1910 we were infinitely more powerful than Germany on the seas ; but that this country was panicked by the shipbuilding magnates into paying them fantastic prices for murderous and gigantic weapons, and Germany was forced by our menacing bombast to enter a fatal race with us for naval supremacy.

That race was won in 1918. Death stood grinning at the finishing-post, and plague and famine have since presented the prizes. We won the race, God help us ; and now, with millions in misery, with festering slums and incredibly fantastic debts, we are lining up in grisly pride ready for the start of a race yet more mad and horrible. The starter, Fear, is already grimacing with pistol upraised.

1909

I wonder if we dare step back ?

The Tory opposition instantly espoused the panic cry for eight dreadnoughts in 1910. Sir Edward Grey, for whom history's inscrutable dictates had arranged the tragic future of presenting our Declaration of War to the German Ambassador in 1914, seems already to have seen the shadow of the coming horror lying across his path, for he said :

> " This is the greatest political crime a Party can commit. It matters little if the crime brings not punishment but promotion. It is perfectly true to say that that half of the national revenue of half the nations of Europe is being spent on preparations to kill each other. Sooner or later this expenditure will submerge civilisation."

Mr. Lloyd George now began to emerge as a speaker of unique powers. The fiercer the attacks on himself or the Government he represented, the more delightedly did he turn on and usually rout the attackers. He has always been at his best with his back to a wall, and his back was to a wall in the matter of the Navy Estimates of 1910. Organised onslaughts were made on this fiery Welshman, but he scattered them with explosions of wit, and terrified them with a withering fire of sarcasm. I could not agree with his outlook, but I could not withhold my admiration of him as an orator.

A matter then of minor interest, which supplied a little comic relief for Members after the battles of the Budget, was raised by Winston Churchill in his support of a Daylight Saving Bill. This Bill was looked upon as fantastic at the time, but Mr. Churchill took what was, for him, a very unusual attitude when he said that it would give the working classes "one hundred and fifty hours annually of extra daylight leisure."

I found myself unable to agree as to the extra *leisure*, though the additional daylight was incontrovertible!

The Bill did not get very far, and as everyone now knows, was made effective only when war conditions later emphasised its advisability. In 1910 the idea of putting clocks forward in April and back in October was publicly denounced as "irreligious," and laughingly dismissed as "impossible."

Lloyd George's 1909 Budget was fated to cause 1909
storms wherever it appeared. After tempestuous times in the Commons it was sent to the Lords. The Upper House evidently determined to resist this attack upon its bulging pockets and stolen lands, in the true spirit of the robber barons of a former age! Scores of peers who had never troubled even to take the oath of allegiance there, came to the House for the first time in their lives. After a debate in which precocious seedlings and elderly hectors egged each other on to assert the divine rights of the nobly born, the Budget was rejected by a tremendous majority, and sent back with the intimation that the

Commons must remember its subordinate place in future.

This action struck at the roots of the British Parliamentary constitution. I well remember Mr. Asquith rising, angry and menacing, and proposing what was equal to a vote of censure on the Lords, which was carried by a majority of over 200 votes. He then dissolved the House and went to the country to seek its endorsement on his action.

The Labour Party naturally faced the ensuing General Election with some misgivings. It was quite on the cards that we might be rejected at the polls because we had failed to satisfy the extremists while occasionally going too far for the approval of our more lukewarm supporters.

Seventy-eight Labour candidates took the field, and forty were returned. Our total vote was considerably increased. There were no sensational changes, but we gained one or two good men. J. H. Thomas came in 1910 for Derby, but we lost Will Crooks at Woolwich. I won my campaign in Manchester with a comfortable margin of votes. Arthur Henderson was succeeded as Chairman of the Labour Party by George Barnes, and we looked forward to a useful period of work before having to face the difficulties of another election.

The Tories gained considerably in strength as a result of the polling, mainly because of their avid support of more costly armaments. During that election one of the most popular songs to be heard wherever Conservative speakers were appearing began with the lines :

“ We don’t want to fight,
But, by Jingo ! if we do—
We’ve got the men,
We’ve got the guns,
We’ve got the money, too ! ”

Not a very uplifting sentiment for a Christian nation, but it seemed to be universally popular.

In the new Parliament of 1910 Liberal and Opposition numbers were so evenly balanced that the forty Labour Members represented a voting power that was eagerly solicited by both the big Parties. This promised us a lively time ahead, with severe political penalties if we abused the curious position of power in which chance had placed us. 1910

Chapter X

1910–1911—President of a Labour Conference—I visit Canada and the United States—Problems of American Labour—Death of Edward VII—Another General Election—Asquith attacked in Commons—A speech on Unemployment—Suffragettes—The Agadir incident—Commons faces a grave risk of war.

While these Parliamentary affairs were in progress the Labour Party was steadily improving its position.

In 1909 the Party held its annual Conference at Portsmouth. I was elected Chairman, and proceedings lasted three days. I took some pleasure in glancing back to the days when I clattered in my clogs to the jenny-gate of an Oldham mill. The road behind me had been hard, and that ahead promised to be harder, but I was certain 1909 by now that it led eventually to a place from which I could help my fellow-workers.

In the presidential address at Portsmouth I emphasized the need for complete independent action in the pursuit of Labour's purpose. Many devices had already been employed to undermine our forces, by proposals for understandings and alliances, especially with Liberal associations. Some Labour men had already gone over to the Liberal persuasion, among them John Burns, who had been rewarded with a Cabinet post. Such contacts might bring momentary success, but eventually they meant the failure of Labour's national purpose.

I appealed for an unflinching peace policy as a central part of our political programme, and I warned the Trade Unions to be prepared for many more blows directed against organised Labour by decisions in the law courts, such as the Taff Vale decision and the Osborne judgment.

Whatever their purpose, these decisions had the effect of crippling Trade Union action in relation to politics.

The records of the Portsmouth Conference showed that nearly four hundred delegates attended, and that in the preceding ten years the membership of the Party had grown from under half a million to nearly a million and a quarter. To double our strength in a decade was a great encouragement.

In December, 1909, I was elected to attend the Convention of the American Federation of Labour as a fraternal delegate. For the first time the meeting was to take place in Canada, and to Toronto I voyaged—a great experience for me.

As the sitting was to extend over a fortnight instead of the five days usually allotted in British sittings, the work was carried through in comfort. Speeches were not 1910
cut to severe time-limits, and the first few days were actually used in " getting acquainted," as they called it, rather than tackling serious business.

Travelling away from the Continent of Europe I gathered a host of new experiences. In Europe all people have common fears and hopes owing to their territorial proximity. On the continent of America, however, a different spirit appeared, at least, before the days of the aeroplane. It seemed in some ways like an isolated land, intent on its own problems and only vaguely aware of the activities of the world outside.

Meeting Canadian and American delegates was very interesting, and showed me many new points of view. I have always held that the considerable travelling which Trade Union leaders are bound to undertake is of great assistance to them politically and otherwise, giving them, as it does, a wider outlook on human problems.

Our entry to Canada was not without a human touch. On landing Mrs. Clynes and I were taken straight to a great gathering of Lancashire folk settled in Canada.

I shall not forget how, as she entered the hall with me, the whole audience rose and sang, " She's a lassie from Lancashire ! "

I found both in Canada and America great numbers of exiles from Britain, and these were exceptions to the general rule of American apathy to European politics, for they were most anxious to know all that was going on at home, and to wish British Labour " God-speed ! "

Samuel Gompers, then a significant figure in the American world, was chosen as President of the Convention, amid scenes of enthusiasm such as can hardly be described. Delegates cheered and applauded till they were hoarse, and one inspired demonstrator, seeing at the far end of the platform a big drum used the previous night in an orchestral performance, seized it and marched round the hall thumping it in time with the cheering.

Gompers was a commanding personality, and had enormous vitality. He was virtually a dictator, and often got his own way by sheer staying power. 1910

During one long report which I heard him deliver, in a speech of well over four hours, he smoked two or three cigars, pacing the platform the while like one assured of endless leisure.

When my turn came to address the Convention, I spoke for nearly an hour and a half. Then, happening to apologise before I sat down for the time my speech had taken, I was met with a noisy demand for more. I spoke on pensions, unemployment benefits, workmen's compensation and similar social measures in Britain to a most attentive audience.

The American feeling seemed to be that such grandmotherly legislation might suit the Old Country, but that there was not the slightest need for it in the great Land of the Free. They were doomed, about twenty years later, to endure the bitter experience of intense and widespread unemployment, with many millions of workless men and women clamouring for public aid, and eventually getting it to the extent of thousands of millions of dollars. By that time it had become the only form of insurance against anarchy, threatened by the economic blizzard which was shaking the financial and trading foundations of the civilised world.

It fell to my lot to explain why, in England, Trade Unions played such a considerable part in politics. I said :

> " The cry has often been raised that Trade Unions should have nothing to do with politics. We did not bring party politics into the Trade Unions in our country, but we brought the Trade Unions into Parliamentary action. That Parliamentary action has not lessened our industrial activity ; it has not diminished our pride in the Unions ; our ardour for the cause of combination in the workshop is no less. Our Trade Unionism is not thrown overboard because we have taken upon our ship the instrument of Parliamentary action."

The applause, however, did not go the length of flattery by imitation, and to this day, in America, working class organisations retain the belief (though in a rapidly diminishing degree) that they can do better by making other political parties bid high for the Labour vote than they can by building up a parliamentary power of their own. 1910

In many respects the Americans have always had before them a task more baffling than any political problem which we in England have had to face. Conflicting influences of race and religion, and narrow loyalties to particular States, have been cemented together with an incredible pride in what they obstinately believed was a perfect system. I remember one speaker at the Convention finishing a glowing tribute to America with the declaration that : " It is God's own territory, the Land of the Free Peoples, where every man does just as he likes, and if he don't, we darned well make him ! " Delegates applauded this sentiment vociferously, some of them with tears of emotion in their eyes.

We travelled down, after the Convention was over, to the United States, meeting all manner of people, from rural peasants to the President at the White House. I visited the homes of numbers of immigrants who had not long left Lancashire, and inspected schools, prisons, docks, factories and senate chambers. I met political leaders, millionaire employers, and workmen of all grades.

Washington, the capital, I found to be a most beautiful national centre, with model streets, fine parks and towering buildings. At every corner was the statue of some defender of Liberty; but unfortunately the inhabitants had no votes! Fear of the use of votes by the coloured population, and the State's bad reputation for former political corruption, had caused this privilege to be withheld in the very State where the nation's business was principally transacted.

In most American cities at that time the only services which were publicly controlled and owned were the parks and water supplies. Trams, gasworks, electricity, the telephone and so on were all owned by private interests.

I made inquiries as to the reason of this condition of things, and was seriously assured that more "graft" 1910 would go on if private citizens were appointed in public interests than if capitalists were allowed to compete with each other in such services.

Wages in America were higher than in England, but as costs were also higher, I doubt whether the worker gained any benefit. A visit to the barber cost more than double the price paid in England. Beer was much dearer; a tram-ride for which I should have paid 1d. in Manchester cost me 2½d. Certain home-produced foods and fruits were as cheap as in England, but no cheaper; house-room, clothing and (despite the Canadian and American wheat crop) bread and cakes were very much dearer.

I was told that many people sent to England for Savile Row suits which cost less, counting freightage, than moderate quality suits cost in the United States. A drink licence cost publicans a sum equal to £320 a year, yet drink regulations were already severe, including Sunday closing, closing on election days, and closing at

7 p.m. on Saturday. In pre-War England there were very few restrictions of this sort.

On my return from America I found the new Parliament of 1910 in a state of uneasy expectancy. Lloyd George's rejected Budget was sent once more to the Lords, and was passed by them this time in scared silence. Then Mr. Asquith's Government introduced a Bill reducing the life of Parliament from seven years to five, and providing that the Lords should never be able in future to interfere in any way with national finance.

One of the arguments used by certain elements in the country at this time, to frighten the House of Commons off any endeavour to curb the powers of the Upper House, was the specious one that the King, whose health had been failing, was being worried and made ill by the conflict between the two Houses.

In May, 1910, Edward VII died. By common consent 1910
the Lords *v.* Commons issue was suspended for the time being, as a gesture of respect to a ruler who had been admired by all alike.

But things could not go on as they were. Government and Opposition were too nearly of the same power ; no real work was done ; and in November another General Election was held, in an endeavour to give one Party or other a working majority.

This second election within twelve months alarmed continental and American observers, and foreign newspapers which should have been better informed began prntiing some sensational articles on the English Revolution, and the flight of King George ! Meanwhile, we ex M.P.s were once again facing our electors, in an England still palled with mourning for the death of its Sovereign.

This time 56 candidates appeared in the Labour interest, and 42 were returned—a net gain of two seats. George Lansbury, a Parliamentary new-comer, won Bow and Bromley ; and the indefatigable Will Crooks reversed his recent defeat at Woolwich. Once again I won my seat in Manchester.

We were very much encouraged by our success, for the Osborne judgment had crippled Labour's Parliamentary fighting powers by cutting the sinews of war ; and a General Election is a tremendously costly affair to the political organisations and individuals involved in it.

Year by year this expense increases. Years ago a few meetings were sufficient in places selected so as to reach the largest numbers of electors. To-day a personal visit must be paid to the remotest parts of the division, and a direct appeal must be offered to an electorate more than four times as numerous as it was twenty years ago. Reform of the Franchise Law, and the extension of votes to millions of women, have been excellent measures, but they have increased the candidate's task out of all proportion to what it formerly was.

Nor has the growth been merely one of numbers. Thousands of people now freely write to or question the Member, who years ago would have shrunk from any 1910 approach to a person so elevated ! A Labour M.P. is more open to criticism than most, for he is regarded not simply as the representative of his own division but as a tribune of the working classes of all Britain. I receive endless complaints of personal grievance and injustice from all over the country. I cannot possibly deal with them, though some make my heart ache. I have to refer them to the Member for the division concerned. So numerous are these requests that if I tried to attend to them all I should be unable to pursue any further political duties !

I remember that this 1910 election was fought with considerable bitterness. Rich men sat all day in their carriages outside polling booths, especially in country areas, not interfering in any way, but exerting the moral terrors of a baleful eye on labourers and employees as they filed in to vote.

Will Crooks, whose former defeat at Woolwich had been celebrated by a local clergyman announcing a "Special service of thanksgiving to Almighty God,"

WILL CROOKS

found the thunders of the pulpit once more directed against his devoted head ; but fortunately he was a man who could well take care of himself in any wordy warfare, and the shouts of laughter from some of his Woolwich meetings echoed very nearly as far as Westminster itself !

Mr. F. E. Smith, whose whole Parliamentary career was notable for his adolescent enthusiasms, announced on the eve of the election that " My Party has the Labour men marked out as Little Englanders and pro-Boers, to be swept completely away." He was himself somewhat of a " new broom," and was actually quite youthfully hairless at the time, which possibly explains why our sweeping-up was so untidily done that there were two more of us afterwards than before !

Ramsay MacDonald was elected Chairman of our re-formed ranks, in place of George Barnes.

At the opening of the new Parliament, with Asquith's Liberals still in power, scenes occurred as stormy as any I have ever seen at Westminster. I will refer later to the general subject of " Disorder in the House," but I must refer here to the disgraceful behaviour exhibited when the Liberal Prime Minister entered the House for the first time in this new session. 1910

With his lip curling contemptuously, Mr. Asquith walked slowly to his place, and then stared coldly across at the Tory benches. The shouting died down under his eye, but the storm was delayed, not averted. The real reason of the Conservative rage was that the General Election, from which they had expected so much, had returned the Liberal Government with a strong working majority. Mr. Balfour furiously attacked all suggestions for curbing the power of the Lords still further, and called Asquith a revolutionary ; Asquith in return poured his sarcasm on Balfour's plans that the Commons should passively accept a situation in which " the House is degraded to the level of a talking club."

In order to force his point Asquith demanded permission from the newly-ascended King George to create sufficient friendly new peers, should such action become necessary, to carry his Bill through the Lords in the teeth of the opposition of the existing Upper Chamber. This set the match to the powder-magazine of Tory indignation. On July 24th, as Mr. Asquith entered the Commons, certain Members loosed such passions as have never been released by the gravest perils or reverses of war.

"Who killed King Edward? Dirty traitor! Don't bully King George!" was yelled from the Tory benches.

Asquith's biting voice was soon heard. He scorned to defend himself; he simply stated that unless the Lords accepted the will of the Commons he would carry his threat into execution and create enough new peers to override their objections. After a fierce two-day debate the Lords agreed by a narrow majority to surrender to the will of the people; and so the first great crack appeared in the battlemented structure of modern feudalism.

Early in this session, in February, 1911, I made my first important speech in the House of Commons. 1911 The King's Speech, the first delivered by King George, had contained no promise either to find work for the unemployed, or to assist in their support, though we had been led to hope that something of this sort might be included. In 1911 very serious industrial troubles were breaking out all over the country, and the mood of the people was such that unless these troubles were sympathetically tackled strikes, riots and perhaps sporadic revolution would soon break out. That we had not over-estimated the dangers was clearly shown by the terrible strikes and lockouts of the next two or three years, when bodies of military were constantly called out.

The Labour Party moved an amendment to the King's Speech regretting this omission, and it fell to my lot to support the amendment. I said:

> "There would be no difficulty in finding suitable work for more than half of these men. They belong to the unskilled and labouring population, and are just

the men who can be most easily put to that class of work which public bodies can provide. I mean the work of reclaiming waste lands, foreshore and river reclamation, the construction of recreation grounds and of larger harbour facilities, and work in that department of afforestation which has so often been advocated as a means for reducing our unemployment. I think one might also add to the list the great openings that are afforded in connection with the development of housing schemes and construction of better homes for the masses. The more you can employ the manual worker, the more surely will you prevent the unemployment of the skilled grades, because there will then be so many others who are able to purchase their products . . .

" There is the question of money. A man in a state of idleness must be kept in one form or another. If you refuse him opportunity to make wealth by labour, he must somehow be living upon the labour of other people . . .

" The very convicts in our prisons are given work to 1911
do, and this work is mainly of the labouring type, in reclamation, building, and so on. The country finds such work far more profitable to itself than if the convicts were kept idle. But for the unemployed nothing is done. It is shameful that a man should be obliged to commit a crime in order to obtain work . . .

" A man cannot live well unless he works. The present Home Secretary has stated that there are two ways of getting a living—you can live by production or by plunder. It is the business of Ministers so to organise the unemployed classes as to make effective use of the great wastage of available labour which now goes on.

" Whatever may be the ideas of other Members as to the principle of a man's right to work, so long as it is legally recognised that a man has the right to live, we will welcome—and I hope the House will welcome—the opportunity of discussing in detail, word by word and line by line, the methods by which legislative effect may be given to our demand."

These sentiments were received by the House with considerable encouragement and Parliamentary applause;

but, alas! the cause of the unemployed man was forgotten before the approval had died away, and has only been remembered by the House with an uneasy jog of conscience at long intervals since.

In this 1911 session the question of Women's Suffrage came sharply to the fore. It had first been brought to wide public notice when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenny, having risen to ask a question on the subject after a big speech made by Sir Edward Grey in Manchester, were brutally set upon by stewards, had their arms twisted, and were flung headlong down the steps into the street. Trying to hold an impromptu meeting of protest there, they were arrested, tried and sent to prison for causing obstruction.

From that day the Suffragettes worked steadily for Parliamentary recognition, at first in an orderly and constitutional manner, but presently with anger and outcry. I think they had reason for their disappointment.

In the election which sent the 1911 Parliament to Westminster Mr. Asquith definitely promised that the Manhood Suffrage Bill should be amended to include women. No real attempt was made by him to carry out his pledge, once he was in power. 1911

The women could not recognise that a promise given to obtain votes might become impossible of redemption when more urgent business was before the House. They branded Asquith "liar," and resorted to militant tactics.

Valuable paintings were slashed, a £15,000 pier was burned down, the windows of the Home Office were smashed by Miss Mary Allen (since Commandant of the Women's Police), empty houses were fired, and women handcuffed themselves to seats in the Strangers' Gallery in the House of Commons. When arrested for causing these disturbances the women went on hunger-strike, and many were forcibly fed until the methods employed induced severe illness, resulting in their release.

One woman threw herself under the hoofs of King

George's entry in the Derby, killing herself and bringing down horse and jockey.

The Labour Party advocated women's suffrage from a very early date, and I have told elsewhere how Mrs. Pankhurst spoke for us in Manchester before I was in the Commons.

After 1911 Mr. Asquith turned bitterly against the Suffragettes, who retaliated on him by making his life a misery whenever he spoke at meetings outside Westminster. On one occasion, when he went to Edinburgh to address a political gathering, he heard that the Suffragettes were waiting for him, and in order to avoid them he hid, it is said, on the floor of his cab under a big check rug. But a determined woman leaned in through the cab window and smothered him with a snowstorm of pamphlets before she was arrested and hauled 1911 off by the police.

The Suffragettes finally got their way, after they had loyally dropped all demonstrations during the period of the War ; and, nowadays, one wonders why all the damage was necessary, before the elementary fact could be recognised that women were as much entitled to a word in the government of their own country as were men. Their destruction of works of art was culpable, perhaps ; but it must be recognised that, as citizens, they collectively owned a half-share in the nation's belongings, and were destroying what was therefore partly their own property.

The Labour Party had more to say during the 1911 session than it had done in any previous Parliament. When the Mines Bill was under discussion, early in the year, we won a good deal of opprobrium by giving some figures of the casualties among miners. At that time over 1,400 miners were killed at work every year ; in the preceding year over 1,600 had been killed.

Over thirty men killed per week. Think of it ! Think of the strain it meant to those who had to work with the Angel of Death standing at their sides !

Again, during a discussion on the perilous situation between England and Germany, due to our increased naval estimates and constant jingoistic threats, Mr. Barnes showed that the cost of the Navy in 1911 averaged £5 per family throughout Great Britain.

A Tory Member jumped up and said that the building of dreadnoughts was a way of employing the labour that " my hon. friend is always so anxious about " ; but Mr. Barnes silenced this jeer by explaining, with significant figures, that the workmen engaged in building warships got a pound or thirty shillings a week, but that the shipbuilding capitalists and the owners of steel firms (who even then were well represented in Parliament and avidly pushing their own interests there) pocketed hundreds of thousands of pounds in unearned profits every time a floating castle of death went gliding down the slipways, amid the cheering of unimaginative onlookers.

If these profits could be distributed in industry without having to be earned a *second* time by the labourers from whose work they had been gathered, said Mr. Barnes, the system of feverish armaments, though still criminal,
1911 would be slightly less iniquitous.

There was no answer from the steel " kings."

Point was given to Mr. Barnes's remarks before the pomp and pageantry of King George's coronation had died away, and while the London unemployed were still raking over the dustheaps from the big hotels that had entertained our many costly royal visitors from other lands who had come to attend the ceremony.

The thunder of the salutes of guns in London had hardly ceased when a deeper rumble sounded from Agadir, where the German gunboat *Panther* had put in with a menacing air that startled the Western world. The apparent intention was that Germany should make a claim to dominion in Morocco.

The French Premier began feverish secret negotiations with Berlin, without the knowledge of his own Government. Lloyd George, who had declared in 1900 that he would resign from politics rather than countenance another war, made a bombastic speech in the City warning Germany that in Britain " she will meet the will of an unyielding people."

The world stood aghast. The Commons met in an atmosphere of breathless premonition, mixed with arrogant assurance from certain Tory hotheads. Few know how close England came to a war with Germany in July, 1911.

" The German Ambassador made me a communication so stiff that it appeared that the fleet might be attacked at any moment," said Sir Edward Grey afterwards. Telegraphic instructions were sent swiftly and secretly to generals, and the armies of Europe began stealthily to uncover their big guns.

Bitterly, France was forced into an agreement to buy off Germany with some small colonial territories. 1911 Veterans of 1870 snarled in the Paris cafés ; young German troopers in the beer gardens of Berlin covered their disappointment and humiliation at the hands of Britain by drinking loudly to " The Day ! " when Britain and France together should be humbled beneath the Kaiser's iron heel.

Mars clanged back his half-drawn sword and strode impatiently onwards, grinning at the thought of 1914, while Labour at Westminster pointed incessantly to his growing shadow, and where it fell the factory chimneys belched smoke by day and glowed lurid at night in the race to prepare more and deadlier weapons for the hurting and killing of men.

Chapter XI

1911–1914—A strike that nearly caused a European war—Mrs. MacDonald—More big strikes—National Health and Unemployment Bills—£400 a year for M.P.s—The *Titanic* inquiry—A visit to Germany and Austria—Labour warnings of coming war—The Irish M.P.s—I visit Ireland—June and July, 1914.

When the Agadir crisis was at its height, all other subjects of debate in the Commons were dropped and Members spoke in hushed voices of the latest despatches from Germany, a great railway strike was in progress in England.

Earlier in the year 20,000 London dockers had come out on strike, and, for two or three days, London's food supplies were in a state of peril as a result, and hasty Cabinet meetings were held to settle the dispute. Immediately after this 10,000 railwaymen came out at Liverpool. A pitched battle was fought in the town
1911 between troops and strikers; two men were shot dead and about 200 injured. Other railwaymen were shot in Wales. Hundreds were summarily dismissed; and after attempts to negotiate, a national railway strike was declared. Thirteen thousand troops marched into London and others were rushed to Liverpool, Cardiff and Glasgow.

This occurred when tension between Germany, France and England over the Agadir affair was already critical. Seeing in the railway strike the germ of military paralysis in Britain, Germany suddenly suspended peaceful negotiations; and the French Government instantly sent a secret communication to our Foreign Office saying that unless our railway strike could be called off within forty-eight hours, war would be declared between Germany and France, in which we should probably become involved.

An emergency Commission was immediately appointed by Mr. Asquith, with orders to settle the strike at any cost. Terms were reached within a few hours, and the strike was called off, whereupon the German-French negotiations began again, and war was temporarily averted.

Ramsay MacDonald, as Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, threw the whole weight of his eloquence into helping to settle this railway strike. To do so he had to leave the bedside of his wife, who was then seriously ill.

Margaret MacDonald died shortly afterwards. The loss to her husband and to the whole cause of Labour was very great. In her celebrated " At homes " at 3 Lincoln's Inn Fields she gathered round her all the fighting spirits of the struggling new Labour Party, and gave each man the encouragement or guidance he particularly needed. I attended some of those gatherings, and was deeply impressed by the hostess's sincerity and fine understanding of our problems. 1911

The railway strike I have described was only one of a series of industrial disputes that broke out in the years immediately preceding the War.

In 1910 a strike of 10,000 miners in the Rhondda Valley lasted for a year, during part of which period large bodies of troops were drafted into the neighbourhood in case the powerful police forces there should be overpowered. Before this strike was settled it had involved over a million miners, and all coal production had ceased.

In 1911, 903 big strikes and lockouts took place, compared with only 399 in 1908. During most of 1913 and 1914 an average of 150 *strikes per month* terrified the country, and civil war seemed at times to be very near. Certain statesmen since have expressed the opinion that only the War saved us from loss of position as a great power, owing to the internal wars in Britain, Ireland and elsewhere, which were brewing when the guns sounded their peremptory call for unity on August 4th. It was during this period of industrial trouble that Mr. Tom Mann was imprisoned on a charge of having incited British troops to mutiny by telling them not to turn their rifles on British workmen, even if they should be ordered to do so.

In the dockers' strike in 1911, which I have mentioned, troops were feverishly rushed to our leading ports, and plans were drawn up at the War Office for filling the London docks with riflemen.

Partly as a measure to placate the angry workers of the country the National Health Insurance Bill was introduced by Lloyd George in 1911. Insurance and medical interests fiercely opposed it, Tories fought it bitterly because it was " pauperising the lower classes " and " discouraging thrift," the Labour Party even was divided because many of us objected to contributions being levied upon employed insured persons.

1911 Hardly had this Bill buffeted its way through the Commons than the Unemployment Insurance Bill aroused even worse opposition. It was to cost the nation less than a million pounds a year, and was a mere tentative beginning, but the men who cried out most loudly for more and bigger battleships were miserly indeed when money was to be voted for the relief of the unemployed. However, the menacing figures of the workless thousands outside the Commons could not be forgotten by the Government ; and, while they shifted troops to this town or that to overawe strikers, they forced through the House this first measure for national relief of those who could not work.

During the 1911 session a measure was introduced that received very little opposition, since all Parties could see the need for it. In effect, this Bill, which enacted that, in future, all Members of Parliament, except Ministers, should receive an allowance of £400 a year, negatived the damage done by the Osborne judgment, as far as Labour M.P.s were concerned.

The resolution was moved by Lloyd George, and was passed by a considerable majority. A Member's travelling and other expenses are necessarily high; his work in the House limits him in the pursuit of other occupations; should he lose his place at an election, he is for the time being either unemployed or able to take only temporary employment; and in the case of Labour Members, it would often be impossible for the best men to take up politics at all if they had to depend on their private capital. Salary this amount should never be called; it is a fair allowance for expenses in Parliamentary work. I think the measure was a wise one, extending the opportunity of Parliamentary representation by their own people to all classes in our land.

During the winter of 1911 Mr. Balfour resigned from the Tory leadership. The place of this courteous, quiet statesman was taken by the more violent and outspoken Mr. Bonar Law. 1911

In April, 1912, the House of Commons was shocked by a sudden announcement that the *Titanic*, the biggest ocean-going liner ever built, had sunk on her maiden voyage. The grief of the nation in this great disaster was immediately expressed; and afterwards the Commons went straight on with the business of approving the construction of costly and cunning devices for committing murder on the high seas, by sanctioning the immediate development of a naval detachment of the new flying machines, which were then the subject of world-wide discussion! I have never forgotten the strange impression of that great assembly of the Commons, mourning at one moment the inhuman cruelty of the sea, and turning next minute to a scheme whereby sailors could be flung headlong, by aerial bombing, into the maw of the insatiable deep.

The public enquiry into the cause of the *Titanic* disaster cost £20,000. This money was cheerfully voted at a time when any suggestion that even half that sum should be used for investigating general causes of injury among seamen in following their trade would have raised a howl of Party protest.

Towards the end of 1912, I was one of a deputation of Labour M.P.s which visited Germany, to study industrial conditions there and to try to discover a way of lessening the friction which the armament capitalists were causing between that country and our own.

We visited schools, hospitals and workshops, examined working class homes, and met heads of municipalities and prominent Socialist leaders. Like ourselves, the German people were feeling the ill-effects of the strenuous armament race which our dreadnought programme had inaugurated.

At that time the Social Democratic Party in Germany was going from strength to strength. Its professed policy was a pacifist one, and great plans were envisaged by its leaders for ensuring the future peace of Europe.

1912 Among other famous Germans I met on that tour was Bethmann-Hollweg, later Chancellor and right-hand man to the Kaiser during the War. He presided at a luncheon given in our honour, and made a speech full of kindly assurances of Germany's desire for peace.

On my return to England, after visits to Brussels, Amsterdam and Vienna, I was struck by the sudden increase in war fever that had recently become noticeable. Lord Roberts and Winston Churchill never ceased from warnings of a coming war with Germany. The wife of the then Archbishop of Canterbury officiated at the launching of the *Thunderer*, one of our latest dreadnoughts. Incidentally, I am reminded by that incident of the way in which history repeats itself, for in a recent newspaper I read an account of the present Archbishop of Canterbury exhorting his Diocesan Conference that the use of force of the sword by the State is the ministry of God for the protection of the people.

The voice of the Labour Party was uplifted against the armament follies that were so clearly leading to coming war.

At the annual Party Conference in Glasgow in January, 1914, I said:

> "The Executive strongly condemns the enormous, ruinous and unnecessary growth in naval expenditure. If we are to avoid world tragedy we must press by every means in our power for a peace federation including Britain, France and Germany . . ."

In the House of Commons Ramsay MacDonald was equally uncompromising. He said:

> "Armaments are run according to a carefully studied financial plan devised by international firms that are no longer competitors. To talk about these various firms being separate or apart is to cover a fraud and a farce.
>
> "They have got directors who are interchangeable. The vice-chairman of one is chairman of another. The chairman of one is the director of another. One company holds shares in the other company, and they have got yards abroad, and fitting-places abroad, and all they need do is to sit down and study the strategy of building in order to get Germany squeezed one year, Great Britain squeezed the next, and Austria and Italy squeezed the next. Then we are called Little Englanders and the changes are rung over a certain gamut of opprobrious epithets." 1912

In supporting MacDonald's view Philip Snowden, after giving particulars of the number of shares held by Tory and other Members of the House of Commons, added:

> "The scare of 1909 was engineered during a period of depression for armament firms. In the case of one firm, the *profits* have increased by half a million pounds a year as a result of the naval scare they engineered four years ago."

Mr. Snowden's speech was a powerful indictment of graft and greed. He showed how armament firms had used bribes all over the world; how arms were sold to one Government and the fact used as a lever to gain orders from that Government's enemies ; how subsidies had been paid to newspapers and patriotic societies.

"Regarding His Majesty's Opposition," he went on, "I should find it difficult to throw a stone without hitting a shareholder." He told how British firms were supplying Austrian torpedoes, how former British Government officials had joined the boards of armament firms after leaving their national posts, and stated that not one of our big armament firms was without ex-public servants among its officials. He quoted an Admiral formerly in charge of our defence plans who went, on retirement, to the Italian branch of a British armament firm ; yet Italy was then ranged in the pro-German alliance against England.

This speech created a sensation throughout the world. In the Commons it seemed as though Members were shrinking away from the thin, angry figure of the Labour orator, lest they should hear their own names spoken. 1912

It was in connection with the interminable debates on rising armaments, and on conscription, which was then being urged by many authorities, that Mr. Baldwin began to emerge from his shell. He had entered the House in 1908, and created no particular interest before the War, seeming to be an ordinary quiet Member without special promise. No one dreamed that this insignificant back-bencher would one day address the Empire on facts leading to the hurried departure from the Throne of an English King who had long been the most popular figure in the world.

The matter of the continental war-clouds, already gathering so menacingly over Britain, was shelved to some extent late in 1913, because of a threat of what amounted almost to civil war nearer home. Ireland, so long denied Home Rule, was not prepared to wait much longer.

I propose in a later chapter to write on the Irish question. It seems appropriate to insert such a chapter in view of the work of the Labour Party in the matter of

Home Rule for Ireland. I shall therefore only touch lightly here on one or two outstanding memories of Irish Members of our pre-War Parliaments, and of the difficulties they had to face there.

They were sometimes very riotous, and always suffered under what seemed to me to be a legitimate grievance. Often, in recent years, I have been asked by persons holding advanced Labour views why the Labour M.P.s in the House do not create scenes to get what they want quickly, "like the Irish Members."

The reason is that our position is not like the position of the Irish Members. We are in Parliament because we have accepted the condition that constitutional government by recognised rules is the best way to achieve reform. We go to the House voluntarily. The Irish Members' grievance was that they did *not* go there willingly. They wished to leave a place which was alien to them. They wanted a separate Irish Parliament, and went to Westminster under protest, to emphasize their wish for separation. It would, of course, be 1912
ridiculous to suggest the parallel that Labour wants a separate Labour Parliament, since that would be undemocratic and dictatorial.

The Irishmen before the War had much to complain about. It was, I remember, the favourite trick of those Members who opposed the idea of Home Rule to delay every debate and obstruct every Bill on the subject, by saying with provocative smiles that the House had not been given time adequately to debate the various clauses.

Once, in January, 1913, Mr. Redmond rose gravely to reply to this charge, and adduced incontrovertible figures from which it was shown that an average of only 20,000 words stood to the credit of each Member who had taken any part in these discussions, and that the official reports filled over 5,500 columns.

He added that the words used, if printed in small type and set end to end, would stretch three times the distance between Ashton-under-Lyne and Bolton. This reference brought a roar of laughter from the Government benches, and some scowls from the Tory Opposition, as the latter had just suffered defeats in both places.

The Irish Members were bitter in their speeches because so many promises had been made to them by the Liberals, which were subsequently broken. Rightly or wrongly, they felt that Mr. Asquith had pledged himself to the cause of Home Rule ; and when, with cynical sharpness, he afterwards denied making any such promises, and derided those who had believed in him, Irish tempers rose, and some regrettable scenes took place.

As an Irishman myself, I sympathised with the disappointment that gave rise to these disorders, though not with the expression of them.

The principal figures in the Irish Party were O'Brien, Tim Healy, T. P. O'Connor, Dillon and the two Redmonds. The Party numbered round about eighty Members.

John Redmond was a remarkable figure. He was a wonderful debater, and a born leader of men ; he kept his 1913 followers in order, and a glance from him could still the greatest uproar. Healy, his spiritual rival, could not equal Redmond in argument, and did not attempt to do so ; but his biting sarcasm, the cynical inflexions of his mobile voice, and his perfect genius for selecting an apt, impudent phrase, made him a terror to all opponents. He was a real Irishman, with a devastating power of ridiculous interjection that could drown the finest speech under wave upon wave of almost hysterical laughter.

During 1913 I was appointed to the panel of arbitrators under the Board of Trade, and acted in that capacity in certain industrial disputes. One of these took me to Dublin, where already there were mutterings of the coming storm that so nearly broke in an Irish-English war in 1914.

By the April of 1914 the situation in Ireland had become tense, and was reflected in the Commons debates. During that month the Carson's Ulster Volunteers landed quantities of rifles and ammunition at Larne. These arms were displayed everywhere, yet no official step was taken. Within two months the Irish Volunteers landed rifles at Howth, as a counter measure. Troops tried to interfere, were stoned, and fired on the threatening mob, killing three, and wounding forty, including women and children.

For a time the two matters of vital interest in Parliament—the Irish problem and the menace of a German war—struggled for priority. The Balkans had been aflame intermittently for several years ; some of the big states there were weakened, and greedy eyes from Europe were already studying how to turn this weakness to account. Russia and Austria stood like glowering mastiffs, watching a group of squabbling terriers, each anxious to seize the bone over which all quarrelled, but each terrified to turn an unguarded flank to the other. Meanwhile France and England were chained to Russia, and Germany to Austria ; while Italy, Turkey and Japan stood hungrily outside the arena. 1914

All these great nations were armed to the teeth. Moreover, the point had been reached when further increase of armaments was almost an economic impossibility—unless war occurred. The situation is very similar to-day.

Students of history will appreciate that war always *does* occur at such moments ; by whose agency, it is difficult to say, unless it is by that of the concerns whose life depends on the continued production of private fortunes from armaments.

Statesmen all over Europe were acutely aware that world sanity was in dreadful peril. I can recall no graver speech during my life in the Commons, than that uttered by Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, at the beginning of July, 1914. He said :

> " Here in Europe we are spending three hundred and fifty million pounds a year on the machinery of slaughter. Is it conceivable that the House of Commons should

> regard that as a state of things which can continue? I cannot believe it."

He went on to show how the great nations were being taxed to the last penny, conscripted to the last man, and demoralised by devilish propaganda, to prepare them for an orgy of slaughter such as the world had never known, and warned the hushed Chamber that Britain could not hope to avoid having to struggle for her existence in the sea of blood which must soon drown sanity and decency in Europe, if the armaments race was not stopped.

He did not know it, I think, but the death-knell of world peace had already begun to toll. Only a few days before that speech the Austrian heir-apparent and his consort had been assassinated in Serajevo, the capital of a little country held by Austrian greed and force. The Austrian generals and politicians seem actually to have welcomed this cruel murder as a pretext to send an ultimatum, couched in impossible terms, to Serbia, which they accused of having instigated the crime.

1914 Diplomatic telegrams began to pass between Potsdam and Vienna, and the Kaiser sent a message containing the words: "Tread firmly on the feet of this Slav rabble."

Serbia, in terror, tried to sound the feeling of her great blood-relation, Russia. Austria mobilised eight army corps to deal with Serbia in the event of a refusal of the ultimatum.

By this time it was the end of July. In the House of Commons all other issues had been laid aside, and an uneasy gathering listened to the text of proposals sent by Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, suggesting that the gathering trouble should be tackled at a Conference in London. This offer was rejected, and on July 28th Austria declared war on Serbia, and made a lightning push towards Belgrade.

Russia instantly mobilised thirteen army corps, which brought from Germany a threat that she would mobilise if any gesture were made against her ally, Austria.

Then came the greatest tragedy of all that welter of errors, terrors and bombast that resulted in the loss of so many millions of young lives. The Kaiser sent a telegram to the Tsar of Russia, saying : " I am using all my influence to induce Austria to come to a loyal and satisfactory understanding with Russia." On receipt of this the Tsar, that weak and tragic figure, ordered that the Russian mobilisation should be suspended, to give the political atmosphere time to clear.

There seems little doubt now that both the Kaiser and the Tsar were trying, at this time, to avoid a general conflict. But, as had happened before, the orders of a ruler were overridden by those of a professional soldier, anxious only to find personal gain in carnage. 1914

The Russian Minister of War, General Sukhomlinov, flouted his Tsar's instructions and deliberately prevented the command for suspending mobilisation from becoming known.

On July 30th the Kaiser received a telegram from the Tsar, signed " Thy Nicky who lovest thee," pleading with him to throw the weight of his personality against a general war. Diplomatic negotiations began to assume feverish haste in London, as in every other capital of Europe. Who was on who's side ?

Chapter XII

August, 1914—The Fleet stands by—A Peace Conference in Brussels—British Labour works for peace—Financial panic in London—Declarations of war—Sir Edward Grey's moves—August 3rd in the Commons—MacDonald declares for peace—Resignations—My statement on the War—Criminal war-time finance—Propaganda—" Not a yard of German colonies."

While the war-clouds were gathering over Europe England found herself in a terrible position, as a direct result of the secretive " backstairs diplomacy " which Labour M.P.s had so often castigated with regard to British foreign policy between 1906 and 1914. No one knew exactly how far Sir Edward Grey had committed us to take part in a European War, but events in Whitehall pointed significantly to the dangers of the " Blank Cheque " which had apparently been endorsed by the Foreign Office.

1914 On July 26th Winston Churchill, the bellicose First Lord of the Admiralty, gave orders on his own responsibility that the British Fleet, assembled at Portsmouth for manœuvres, should not disperse but should hold itself in readiness for war. This action, taken two days before the Austrian-Serbian quarrel came to a head, may well have affected profoundly the political events of the next few days in Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg and Paris.

Three days later the International Socialist Bureau met in Brussels in special session, to throw the weight of organised world Labour against the machinery of bloodshed and destruction that the War Lords had set in motion. Messrs. Jaurès of France, Hasse of Germany, Rubanovitch of Russia, Vandervelde of Belgium, Morgari of Italy and Keir Hardie of Britain signed a declaration in favour of a peaceful settlement of the Serbian question.

The gathering was impressive, but it was too weak to direct world opinion. Nevertheless, so that every obstacle to organised national murder should be removed a private murder was committed. Almost immediately he returned to Paris from this meeting, Jean Jaurès, its leader, who possessed tremendous influence among the working classes all over the world, was brutally assassinated in a Paris café, so as to remove the menace to war provided by his increasing efforts.

The British Section of the International Bureau met in London at the end of July. An appeal, signed by Keir Hardie and Arthur Henderson, was immediately issued. It read:

> " The long-threatened European war is now upon us . . . You have never been consulted about this war. . . . The workers of all countries must strain every nerve to prevent their Governments from committing them to war. . . .
>
> " Hold vast demonstrations against war, in London and in every industrial centre. . . .
>
> " There is no time to lose; already, by secret agreements and understandings, steps are being taken which may fling us into the fray. . . .
>
> " Proclaim that, for you, the days of plunder and butchery have gone by. . . . Down with the rule of brute force! Down with war! Up with the peaceful rule of the people! "

1914

A gigantic demonstration was immediately held in Trafalgar Square. Amid the howls and jeers of jingoist hecklers who attacked listeners on the outskirts of the meeting, and sang " God Save the King ! " and " Rule, Britannia ! ", speaker after speaker prophesied the years of terror and grief that were ahead of us. Ramsay MacDonald was among those who addressed the crowds. I spoke at a huge and stormy meeting in Manchester.

Financial panic raged in London. On July 29th unprecedented conditions ruled on provincial exchanges. During that black day seven big London firms were declared defaulters.

Nearly three million pounds in gold was withdrawn from the Bank of England in the week before August Bank Holiday. Four more failures were announced on the London Stock Exchange on July 30th.

On the Saturday morning before the holiday, queues stood outside every bank demanding cash. The National Penny Bank had to suspend payment. By 12.30 on the Saturday the Bank Rate had soared from 3 per cent to ten per cent. By 1 p.m. when the doors closed clerks were trembling on their feet from the strain of handing out gold to the panic-stricken customers, and directors were wondering how soon a national financial crash would occur.

The most fantastic devices were resorted to in order to still public alarm. In many great banks clerks were seen
1914 in an unbroken file, walking into the building carrying bags of sovereigns. Half a dozen clerks sufficed in each branch; they simply went in at one door and out of another, out of sight of the customers, who were thus partially soothed by the appearance of an apparently endless river of cash flowing into the bank.

On July 31st French and German troops faced each other across the French frontier, and dust-covered German infantrymen were pouring into the great frontier fortress of Metz, singing hymns and with garlands on their rifles.

On August 1st France ordered general mobilisation, which, in her position, was an unofficial declaration of war. Germany mobilised on the same day, and war with Russia was declared by Germany at 5 p.m., amid enormous scenes of excitement in Berlin.

Meanwhile the diplomatic offices in all the capitals of Europe were buzzing like beehives. On August 1st the German Ambassador in Paris called at the Quai d'Orsay to ask on what terms France would stand out of the coming struggle. He was told that "France would do what her interests dictated."

Prince Lichnowsky, German Ambassador in London, telegraphed that he had received an enquiry whether Britain, France and Germany would stand out, leaving Austria and Russia to settle affairs between them.

Sir Edward Grey was besieged by foreign representatives; and the President of France sent a personal appeal to King George asking him to place Britain beside France in the event of war. Our Cabinet was split from top to bottom. Asquith, the Prime Minister, did not want war, and his Party were sworn to oppose it; but the strongest figure in the Cabinet was Grey, and his years of secret agreement with France now left him in such a position that it is said that he threatened to resign if we shirked the fulfilment of his promises to the Quai d'Orsay. Rather than offend Grey, Asquith allowed himself to hesitate, to "Wait and see," till the sword was thrust violently into his hand.

During the first three days of August the German Ambassador made several offers to Sir Edward Grey which aimed at securing our neutrality. He suggested that the integrity of France and her colonies might be guaranteed, and that Belgian independence and integrity should be guaranteed also. These offers were kept secret. **1914**

On August 2nd, after having rejected, without reference to the Commons, all the German diplomatic offers, Grey, on his own responsibility, without even obtaining the consent of the Cabinet, informed France that if the Germans attacked her in the Channel or the Atlantic, the British Fleet would intervene. Reassured of this powerful support, France seems to have ceased all efforts to remain at peace.

On Bank Holiday Monday, August 3rd, while millions of holiday-makers in straw hats or long skirts listened to nigger minstrels round our coasts, in perfect summer sunshine, Germany declared war against France, on the alleged grounds that French aircraft had bombed German towns and French troops had crossed the German frontier. On the same day German troops marched through Luxembourg, nominally a neutral state, and demanded the right to march through Belgium towards Paris. The German Ambassador in Brussels offered to guarantee Belgian independence and increase her territories after the War, and stated that his request was based on the knowledge from spies that French infantry were already marching into Belgium.

The request was refused, but the grey-coated infantrymen were already pouring over the frontier.

King George had only slept in uneasy snatches for several nights. Asquith, in one of his diaries, told how " The King was hauled out of his bed about 1.30 a.m." and sat in a dressing-gown while a personal telegram was composed from himself to the Russian Tsar, begging him to try to keep the peace of the world. On August 3rd King Albert of the Belgians sent King George a personal appeal on similar lines. But the kings and emperors who had played at soldiers for so many peaceful years were now to see their scarlet and 1914 khaki toys take on a sudden terrible reality, and march into the smoke of Hell, singing deep-throated songs that drowned the shrill orders to them to turn back.

On August 3rd I attended a meeting of a crowded and tense Parliament, where every man asked in hushed tones of his neighbour what awful decisions would be taken before the brilliant sunshine outside changed to a darkness symbolical of the end of an era.

I was told by a Member that when Asquith left Downing Street the crowd which had gathered outside began to cheer him, and another member of the Cabinet who was with him turned to him and said : " Hail, Cæsar ! Those who are about to die, salute thee ! "

At three o'clock Sir Edward Grey rose to tell the Commons the details of Britain's position on the brink of the inferno. A sigh seemed to sweep through the packed assembly as he got to his feet ; it was afterwards compared to " the pressing about Westminster of the shadows of millions yet to die." Before he could say a single word the silence was broken with cheering and yelling, while a flutter of handkerchiefs waved from Liberal and Opposition benches alike.

Grey's speech was a magnificent piece of emotional oratory, in which vital facts were suppressed, and patriotism was inflamed almost to a degree of agony. He justified his action in promising France naval support by brilliant casuistry, and spoke of "obligations of honour" between us and France and Russia.

He was cheered after almost every sentence, and the atmosphere soon resembled that of an hysterical meeting of excited ladies, rather than that of a Parliamentary debate on which the lives and happiness of millions depended. Grey stressed the question of Belgian neutrality. He pointed out that the Germans had demanded a passage through Belgium, the sanctity of whose frontiers both Germany and ourselves had guaranteed.

He did not explain why he and Asquith had agreed for years that the French coast should be left unprotected on a promise of our assistance if Germany ever attacked those coasts. He kept silent on the matter of the German Ambassador's proposals for peace, and said nothing of the fact that Lichnowsky had finally asked us to propose *our own conditions* of neutrality, and that he himself had declined to discuss the matter. 1914

He read aloud the telegram from King Albert to King George, and added :

> "If, in a crisis, we run away from these obligations of honour and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether, whatever material force we might have at the end, it would be of very much value in place of the respect which we should have lost. . . . We must be, and are, prepared for the consequences of having to use all our strength at any moment to defend ourselves and take our part."

Amid an unceasing uproar of cheering Mr. Bonar Law rose and offered the Government the full support of the Tory Opposition to a war programme. Mr. Redmond then stood up and announced that all British troops might be withdrawn from Ireland, that Irish Volunteers would defend their country against German invasion, and that Irish regiments would serve loyally in whatever part of the world they were required to go. This declaration on behalf of a country then on the verge of a private war against us, aroused deafening enthusiasm all over the House.

And then came a jarring note. Mr. MacDonald rose to express his own views and to a large extent to speak for the Labour Party, which he officially led. Speaking with deep emotion in his fierce Highland voice, he said :

> " I should, had circumstances permitted, have preferred to remain silent this afternoon. But circumstances do not permit of that. . . .
>
> " The Right Hon. Gentleman's speech has been impressive, and we have not been able to resist the moving character of his appeal. But I think he is wrong . . . I think the verdict of history will be that he is wrong. We shall see . . .
>
> 1914 " There has been no crime committed by statesmen of this character without those statesmen appealing to their nations' honour. We fought the Crimean War because of our honour. We rushed to South Africa because of our honour. The Right Hon. Gentleman is appealing to us to-day because of our honour. . . .
>
> " What is the use of talking about coming to the aid of Belgium, when, as a matter of fact, you are engaging in a whole European War which is not going to leave the map of Europe in the position it is in now ? . . .
>
> " The feeling of this House is against us. I have been through this before, and 1906 came as part recompense. It will come again. . . .
>
> " Whatever may happen, whatever may be said about us, whatever attacks may be made upon us, we will take the action of saying that this country ought to have remained neutral, because in the deepest parts of our hearts we believe that that is right, and that that alone is consistent with the honour of the country. . . ."

When Pontius Pilate asked the mob at Jerusalem to choose between Christ and Barabbas, they would have none of the Prince of Peace. So it was in Parliament on August 3rd, 1914. Peace is never popular on the verge of war.

All that night and next day men ran to and fro through the rooms of the Foreign Office, and the radio was crackling its ceaseless terrible message from the Admiralty: "Calling all ships! Calling all ships . . ."

When Sir Edward Grey returned to his office from the Commons on August 4th, someone congratulated him on his speech. He turned away to a window, a shrunken figure, muttering: "I hate war!"

Already the summer twilight was blurring the outlines of the Government buildings, and here and there a light twinkled from a window. "The lamps are going out all over Europe," Grey added, in a choked voice. "We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime." 1914

All through the night every window in the Foreign Office blazed with light as Britain's resources all over the globe were gathered together for the purposes of slaughter. Through some astounding error the German Ambassador, Prince Lichnowsky, was sent his passport at 10 p.m., because a message had come through that Germany had declared war on us. This message was almost immediately found to be incorrect, and a Foreign Office clerk took a corrected statement and asked the Ambassador to return the previous package.

"You will find it there," said Lichnowsky, listlessly, pointing to a side-table. He was listening to the crowds below, from whom rose faint sounds of cheering, interspersed with "The Marseillaise" and the National Anthem.

At midnight, two hours after this had happened, as Germany had not replied to our ultimatum, we declared war against her, and troop-trains and the grey shapes of the dreadnoughts began to glide out into the darkness for unknown destinations.

After receiving the blessings of their churchmen and the assurance that they were marching in the cause of God, column after column of German infantrymen tramped singing towards Mons, the Somme, Ypres and Verdun. Bearded priests in St. Petersburg were blessing the long bayonets of the "Russian steam-roller," so soon to be broken at Tannenberg; French *poilus*, crowding into troop-trains in Paris, wept with emotion as exquisitely dressed society women exhorted them to "Remember 1870!" At Aldershot brown-faced Tommies swarmed and sang "Tipperary," and talked excitedly of a German campaign that would be over by Christmas.

On August 5th the Executive of the Labour Party met in London. The question of war had split our ranks asunder. We had always declared against war; yet now we were actually committed to a titanic struggle on the battlefield. How did we stand?

Our leader, MacDonald, had declared unflinchingly that he would follow a pacifist course. But there was, I remember, great discord at the meeting as to whether he was right, or whether loyalty to our country, now that it was actually involved in war, did not stand above Party considerations. 1914

Before the meeting had fought its stormy way to a close MacDonald had resigned his leadership, and Arthur Henderson had been appointed in his place. It was decided to put on record Labour's protest at the political muddle which had brought Britain to this grave pass, but the majority of us felt that, having got to a stage where our protests could not keep England out of a war which was already in existence, we could serve her better by unswerving, if protesting, loyalty "for the duration" than by splitting her ranks in the hour of her dreadful need.

Two of our resolutions ran as follows:

> "That Sir Edward Grey, as proved by the facts that he gave to the House of Commons, committed without the knowledge of our people the honour of our country to supporting France in the event of any war in which

> she was seriously involved, and gave definite assurances of support before the House of Commons had any chance of considering the matter.
>
> " That the Labour movement reiterates the fact that it has opposed the policy which has produced the war, and that its duty now is to secure peace at the earliest possible moment on such conditions as will provide the best opportunities for the re-establishment of amicable feelings between the workers of Europe."

Keir Hardie, Jowett, Snowden and Tom Richardson supported MacDonald in his pacifist views. John Burns and Lord Morley had already resigned Government posts, because of similar feelings.

Like so many others at that time, I had my own personal battle to fight with my conscience, on the subject of peace or war. I knew well, even then, that for an M.P. to give his support to a policy of war meant tacitly signing the death-warrant of millions of men. It meant the legal sanction of forces of destruction so gigantic that not in a whole century could the world build up 1914 what a few short years of modern warfare might smash.

But it seemed to me that we could no longer declare for peace when the country was already at war. We had now to resist, or else to surrender. We had either to repel an attack or submit to forces which would eventually have repressed the rights of peaceful progressives throughout Europe. In early August, 1914, I was asked to state my views, as a lieutenant of Labour, and wrote as follows in the *New Leader* :

> " Hell is now located. It stretches across the frontiers of nations. The diplomats and war-lords have hurried us to the bloodstained fields of Europe, where the Devil's work is being done on a scale greater than the half-blind eyes of mankind have ever seen before. The life and treasures of peoples are being offered up as sacrifices for reasons and treaties which the masses of any nation had never the chance to discuss or understand.
>
> " Each nation led into the war is invoked by Church and State to defend its honour against the other, and the

faith and fatherland of men assembled for the work of massacre are paraded for foul achievements. Reason resigns, and the rifle becomes *the least savage* of the instruments with which Christians, now flung into a state of barbarism, will settle their affairs. Who will jeer at the Socialist now for his unheeded warnings? We cried out that the secret plans of ministers were leading to a dangerous jealousy which would require only the act of a single autocrat or privileged fool to expand into the most horrible slaughter the world has known.

" The frothy rhetoric of ministers and politicians served its purpose, and the purse of the people in time of peace was drained. Security for peace, instead of being increased, was lessened as the mountain of armaments grew and grew in country after country. ' The Balance of Power ' was blessed as the diplomatic doctrine of sages, and was paraded as a certain means wherewith to narrow the area of any quarrel. That amazing confidence in a diplomatic fetish will soon be drowned in blood.

" The force of mighty armies of men may push the lines on the map this way or that, but the men who 1914 return will find when peace is restored that the state of the people will remain unchanged, and the task of millions of drudges must be faced and performed as before. Hopes as always in war, are high as to what this war will settle. It will settle very little for long, for wars make nothing lasting except the hatreds they engender.

" *Victory will make the successful arrogant, and prowess must feed on even greater store of costly and glittering armaments than before.*

" War sets reason aside, and the price of the battle is too high for much generosity to the vanquished. The beaten forces will harbour hate and nurse revenge in the hope of some later day dawning when their lost laurels can be regained.

" *You poor! ' Your Country Needs You ' at the front; see to it that your country does not forget that it needs you if you come back!* "

When I wrote that I did not feel that I was setting up as a prophet. The results, however, which can be traced in all the great events following upon the end of the war, are exactly as so many of us foresaw when the struggle began. We had no guide but history ; and now later history has shown precisely those economic, social and psychological effects which we set down in August, 1914.

After the first day or two Britain began to settle down to a state of war. I noticed soldiers in khaki, carrying kitbags, converging cheerily on the terminus stations in London, and now and then a column marched through the streets, cheered and accompanied by civilians, women and children.

" It'll all be over by Christmas, lads ! " shouted the onlookers, stamping in time with the tramp of the military.

" Ah—we'll have our Christmas dinner in Berlin, you see ! " was the laughing answer from the Old Contemptibles, who were going out to Mons to learn the agony of flight and the pang of death in roadside mud.

In Parliament every speech bore a cheap wartime glamour. It was agreed that no by-elections should be fought " for the duration," constituencies simply returning 1914 another member of the same Party whenever a seat became vacant. All Parties agreed to sink Parliamentary differences and support the Government till Germany had been defeated.

One hundred million pounds of the people's money was voted by a carelessly generous Commons within the first two or three days of the war, to be spent on the materials of slaughter. The attitude of the Government to war-time finance was frankly that of the man who said : " Damn posterity ! What has posterity done for me ? "

And so the nightmare cost of war was financed almost entirely with money we had not got, filched from the pockets of an unborn posterity, which was thus condemned to crippling taxation and ruinously inadequate social service to fill the bulging wallets of the wartime profiteers.

A National Debt of thousands of millions, which will burden Great Britain for the rest of this century, was gaily incurred during the years of the War. Some will never hunger for it, or be unemployed through it ; but we Labour men know that millions hunger and are unemployed because of it to-day, even while further fortunes are being diverted from those men's assistance to engorge the armament firms' bank balances, belonging to the war-time profiteers' sons.

A sensational measure swiftly passed through Parliament in the first few days of the War was that currency notes valued at £1 and 10s. should be issued by the Treasury. They were put into circulation on August 7th, and since then have become an accepted part of our national tender.

Gradually public confidence in British money began to be restored. On August 7th the Bank Rate dropped back to 6 per cent, and thereafter it gradually returned to normal. On the Stock Exchange, after some weeks of dangerous discontent, buying and selling became more stabilised.

Meanwhile, the fighting spirit of the nation, at first alarmingly stagnant, was being rapidly worked up by propaganda, much of which was lying and artificial.

1914 " Little Belgium," " The War to end Wars," " Never Again," and " Is *This* Worth Fighting For ? " are slogans which will be remembered by all who could read the hoardings during the War years. Booklets were printed and distributed throughout the country, giving details of German atrocities—the tossing of Belgian babies on bayonets, the rape of women and girls, and the torturing of wounded—for which, at that time, there could not have been real proof.

It was stated on good authority after the War that photographs published in Germany professing to show actual Russian atrocities in East Prussia, were immediately reproduced by the Allies with the titles changed, stating that they represented German atrocities in Belgium.

It was with such means as these, and worse, that the Governments which had lightly led the world into

Armageddon " for their honour " inflamed the feelings of the young men so that they should not resent being sent like sheep to the slaughter.

Shortly after the outbreak of war Lloyd George, who had solemnly sworn during the Boer War that he would resign from politics if ever England entered an armed struggle again, made some speeches which went echoing from end to end of Britain. He said :

> " The British Empire is finding its purpose in the great design of Providence upon earth, finding it in this great war for liberty and for right. This is a holy war, not a war of conquest. 1914
>
> " As the Lord liveth, we seek not a yard of German colonies. We are in this war with motives of purest chivalry. . . ."

At the end of the War the *whole* of the German colonies were torn from her, and clawed for by the greedy, quarrelling victors at Versailles.

As a direct result of that spoliation, and of our broken vows to disarm, Britain stands now, in this year of grace, on the verge of another " War to End Wars." Our men who died in Flanders, thanking God with their last agonised breaths that at least their babies should never have to meet poison gas and jetted flame, are being betrayed even while I write this. There are those who mock at their faith and write them down as simple fools.

We have learned nothing. I wonder if they grieve for us ?

Chapter XIII

August, 1914–1915—Asquith and Kitchener—Early Allied disasters—Labour's war outlook—Financing the war from posterity—Trebitsch Lincoln, M.P., expelled from England—My food control proposals—Profiteering—Churchill and the Dardanelles—My war attitude attacked—The shell scandal—Trouble in the Cabinet—Labour joins the Coalition—Death of Keir Hardie—Rumours of Conscription.

When England declared war on Germany Lord Kitchener, who had the reputation of being the finest soldier in the world, was in England, on leave from Egypt. Mr. Asquith sent him a telegram ordering him to cancel his arrangements to return to the East, and to report immediately in London.

1914 On August 5th, after a talk with Asquith, he accepted the post of Secretary of State for War. He was an ideal man for the job, possessing every qualification save one. The fault was that he was peculiarly tactless, and swift to anger if the demands of any other department of the Government clashed with his imperious will.

On August 9th Kitchener startled the country by asking for 100,000 recruits to the colours, for " three years or the duration of the war." Distinguished members of the Government were aghast. England had been practically promised a " Hurrah war," all over by Christmas, 1914. With typical obstinacy and foresight, " K. of K." announced that we were facing a long, grim struggle, not a victory march ; and the propagandists who believed in getting recruits first and letting them discover what they were up against afterwards were furious and dismayed.

One of his chief critics was F. E. Smith, the newly-appointed Censor of War News.

During the first two or three weeks after the outbreak the Commons met in uneasy expectancy. It soon became terribly obvious that Kitchener was right, and that the optimists were wrong.

I shall never forget the dread and oppression at St. Stephen's when, on August 23rd, the news came through that the grey hordes from Germany were pouring through Brussels, from which the Belgian Government had been forced to flee. After that, blow followed blow. We heard that our invincible Expeditionary Force was in flight, leaving half its number dead to mark where a heroic but useless effort had been made to stop the irresistible might of armed Germany. We learned that the French Government had fled from Paris ; that von Kluck's Uhlans were at the city gates, and his main army only thirty miles away. The ghostly bowmen of Crecy and the Angels of Mons had delayed them no more than the deadly rifles of " French's Contemptible Little Army," as the Kaiser designated our force.

It has been disclosed since that plans were already being prepared in case the Government had to leave London, following a German thrust across the Channel. We were face to face with disaster and humiliation. But the Germans had outrun their own communications, and a paralysing blow at his rear, struck by half-armed French troops sent by the thousand in crowded, commandeered taxi-cabs and buses, made von Kluck retrace his steps when Paris lay almost unprotected under his hand. 1914

Had the Germans been flung back from the French and Belgian frontiers in the early weeks of the War, it is possible that British Labour might have hesitated further over its attitude towards the coming struggle. But, with the future of our country actually in danger, the time for deliberation was past. Blame could be apportioned later ; the immediate task before us all was to save England from invasion.

Many Labour M.P.s spoke in favour of assisting the Government, and on August 24th an Industrial Truce was signed on behalf of the leading Trade Unions, to put an end to strikes and trade disputes for the period of the War. At a time when our very existence depended on our output of war materials this truce sent hundreds of thousands of men back to work, and relieved the Government of its most serious internal embarrassment.

Early in September Winston Churchill, now really in his element at the Admiralty, rushed over to Antwerp, already menaced by the victorious Germans, to arrange to draft a British naval brigade to assist in the defence of what was then considered an absolutely impregnable fortress.

1914 By October 7th the mighty bastions had been hammered into dust by the siege-guns of the invaders, a big British force had fled over the Dutch border and been interned there, and Antwerp had fallen.

Meanwhile, in England, political and other opponents of Labour spared no effort to brand us as traitors who wished to stab England in the back in her hour of danger. In October a number of Labour M.P.s, of whom I was one, issued a manifesto clearly stating the war aims of the Party, and this manifesto was endorsed by Labour leaders all over the country. This cleared the air to some extent.

Meanwhile the Allies were becoming momentarily more terribly beset. Turkey had joined the league against us, and other Balkan countries were wavering. In face of increasing peril Mr. Asquith, at first reluctant to declare a specific war policy, hardened his heart. On November 9th, in a speech at the Guildhall, he made a declaration which echoed across the world :

> " We shall never sheathe the sword, which we have not lightly drawn, until Belgium recovers in full measure all and more than all that she has sacrificed, until France is adequately secured against the menace of aggression, until the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed upon an unassailable foundation, and until

the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed."

In November, 1914, the first War Budget was introduced to the House by Lloyd George. Members sat aghast as the Welsh financial wizard talked glibly of hundreds of millions of pounds which the nation must spend to support the cost of war for a few months.

There still remained among us some elderly M.P.s who could remember when elections had been fought on a promise that income-tax, then a few pence in the pound, should be entirely abolished. All of us knew, as we listened to Lloyd George's new Budget, that income-tax could never be abolished now, and must soar till every man, woman and child in the State felt its direct or indirect effects.

Labour Members, myself among them, were in favour of raising money for war purposes by a capital levy on wealth, or at least on war profits. Already men here and there in England had made millions by "cornering" national necessities, such as ships, and selling to the Government at prices which allowed several thousand per cent profit to themselves. 1914

Even then, in 1914, the possibility of future conscription of human beings was visible to those who had eyes to see; yet rather than conscript the wealth of the country, private profiteers were offered fantastic rates of interest to lend it to the Government. Men were to be forced, against their wills and convictions, to go out and be slaughtered; but the pockets of the financiers who stayed safely at home must be kept sacrosanct.

During the first few weeks of the War Parliament lost one of the most amazing Members ever sent to Westminster. Timothy Trebitsch Lincoln, ex-Presbyterian minister and Church of England clergyman, had been elected to represent Darlington. Soon after war was declared this man went to Lord Fisher, at the Admiralty, openly confessed that he had formerly been a spy of Germany, and suggested a plan whereby he claimed that the German High Seas Fleet could be lured out of hiding and destroyed.

He offered to send the German authorities information that a weak detachment of our ships would be in a certain place at a set hour ; that, he said, would bring forth the main German Fleet to destroy them ; but they would find, instead of a few victims, the whole of the British naval might drawn up ready to receive them.

Fisher told Lincoln to wait, and went out to make telephonic enquiries from the Special Branch of Scotland Yard as to the man's past. The answer he received is not known, but he went back to the M.P., after half an hour, and warned him to get out of England.

Trebitsch Lincoln took himself off to America on the next boat. Later, he published in a New York newspaper an account of his effort to " get the British Fleet at a disadvantage in the North Sea, there to be torpedoed and destroyed by the German Fleet."

This man later became a lama in Tibet ; his certificate of naturalisation (he was a Hungarian by birth) was revoked in 1919 for disloyalty to His Majesty.

In December, 1914, the House of Commons was shocked to receive the news of the bombardment of Scarborough, Hartlepool and Whitby ; 127 civilians had been killed and over 550 injured. At a Committee 1914 of Defence a few weeks before the raid Lloyd George had said : " If I were a German I should bombard Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Sunderland, where the great steel industries could be damaged." Kitchener had agreed that the Germans might be tempted to make such a raid, and had complained that the Admiralty arrangements for protecting the coast there were inadequate.

Christmas, 1914, passed. The Kaiser had failed to make good his boast that he would eat his Christmas dinner in Buckingham Palace ; the brown-faced Tommies who went out in August singing " Tipperary " and talking of camping in Berlin before the new year, were mostly dead in the Flanders mud. The war which began with cavalry charges had changed to a choking infantry death-grip.

Already, in England as well as in Germany, food was growing scarcer. An hysterical outburst of patriotism against foreign bakers in London one evening had faced the city with a bread famine next day, so narrow was the margin between complacency and terror.

In February, 1915, I brought forward in the House of Commons certain definite proposals for the direction of food control and supply. This was, I believe, the first suggestion made in England of any rationing scheme, and it was met with equal quantities of derision and resentment.

I advised that the Government should take charge 1915
of the shipping of the nation, as well as the railways, and regularise the distribution and sale of food, at the same time controlling the prices of certain commodities which profiteers were already sending sky-high.

The buying and selling of ships was becoming a grave national scandal. One vessel which had been rusting in dock for years was given a coat of paint over its rotting hull, sold for £20,000, sold again for £30,000 within a week, and again for £90,000 a bare two months later. During this time it did not put to sea ; it was bought and sold " on paper."

All sorts of old, unseaworthy vessels were brought into the market, and changed hands several times before they were used. When they got to sea, many of them sank in the first storm. A dreadfully high proportion of the ships lost during the War were not sunk by German submarines but by the criminal greed of British titled profiteers.

I gave figures and outlined facts about the shipping scandal in my speech. I also suggested that the Government itself might acquire supplies of certain vital foods, so as to be able to keep prices as low as circumstances permitted. My ideas were coldly received, and I was given the impression in certain quarters that I was a scaremonger trying to gain political credit by uttering frightening fictions. The same thing was said of Kitchener, when he denied that the War would end victoriously in four months.

Early in 1915 I was appointed a member of the Munition Workers' Health Committee. The work of this body was badly needed at the time, for shell factories had been hastily erected and more hastily equipped, and the lack of safety devices or regulations regarding health was appalling.

During my work with the Committee I saw men and women with their faces and hands tinged to sickly yellow through exposure to picric acid fumes ; I examined the smoking ruins of buildings where ghastly explosions had taken place ; and played my part in drafting regulations which prevented children and women not in normal health from going greedily into noisome factories, where huge wages were paid, and still huger private profits made.

1915 In February an Inter-Allied Socialist Conference was held in London, under the chairmanship of Keir Hardie, attended by representatives from the working classes of England, Belgium, France and Russia. At this meeting the League of Nations was foreshadowed in the following resolution :

> "That, after the war ends, the working classes of our countries shall unite to suppress secret diplomacy, put an end to the interests of militarism and those of the armament manufacturers, and establish an international authority to settle points of difference among the nations by compulsory conciliation and arbitration, and to compel all nations to maintain peace."

Great excitement was aroused in the Commons in April, 1915, when the first reports came through that the Germans were using flame-throwers and poison gas at Ypres. The Allied position was becoming very bad. Russia, on whose 15,000,000 fighting men we had all relied, was now producing less shells in a month than her batteries at the front used in a day ; and her ammunition reserves were almost gone. Rifles were so few that thousands of Russian soldiers had literally to oppose the German and Austrian bullets and bayonets with stones and wooden clubs. Smashed at Tannenberg, routed in Carpathia, the Tsar's armies had become a fleeing rabble from whom nothing more could be expected unless vast supplies of arms could be poured into the country for their use.

Everyone knows now how Churchill, undismayed by the Ostend debacle, cajoled Kitchener and the Cabinet into our heroic, wasteful effort to capture the Dardanelles. Had his project been successful, it would have been the finest strategic move of the War. Rifles, guns, ammunition and uniforms could have been sent to Russia, and a mighty offensive could have rolled over Eastern Germany.

But our Navy was too bluff and hasty, and our Army was too cunning and slow. The Dardanelles affair cost us prestige, influence and hundreds of thousands of lives wasted for nothing at all.

Churchill's supreme self-confidence received a severe 1915 blow. To get his own way over this plan and in the War Council he had nearly caused Lord Fisher's resignation. When the two Admiralty experts disagreed, Fisher rose suddenly, saying: "If this mad plan is carried out I shall resign."

Kitchener persuaded him to give it a trial, however. A tremendous naval attack on the Dardanelles cost the Allies three battleships sunk and four disabled; the Turks lost forty men killed! Then a combined naval and military attack gained a footing there—at ghastly cost. On some of the beaches British soldiers were suffocated to death beneath the corpses of their slaughtered comrades. After months of massacre we evacuated the Peninsula, and admitted a crushing defeat whose effects shook our whole Eastern empire.

His riskily brilliant plan having been ruined by stupid execution, Churchill resigned. He said at the time:

> "I am leaving the nation, and the Navy, in a state of perfect efficiency. I shall give the Government my

> support, make a few more speeches, and then I shall go to the front. I could not continue to hold a sinecure office at such a time."

He did, in fact, return to active service for a short time, but soon afterwards resumed his political career, and held various important positions.

During 1915 I received a great deal of criticism from certain eager officials of the Independent Labour Party because I supported a policy of active Labour co-operation in the War. I was unable to attend the Party Conference held in Norwich, so I sent the General Secretary a letter containing the following statements:

1915

> "On the general questions of secret diplomacy, unrevealed commitments, the iniquity of war, the supply of armaments for profit, militarism, and the making of rival Treaties which do not reconcile nations in any real sense but only cause powerful nations to increase their suspicion and fear of each other—on all these questions we are agreed . . .
>
> "On certain events immediately preceding the war, the position of the National Council of the I.L.P., as expressed in a variety of statements, is not clear to me. I conclude I am right, however, in stating the position of the Council to be as follows:
>
> "(1) That despite the action of Germany in relation to this war and the events of last August, this country should not have entered into the war.
>
> "(2) That the Labour Party should not have co-operated with other Parties in appealing to men to join the Army or Navy.
>
> "I am opposed altogether to the attitude of the National Council of the I.L.P. on these two important questions.
>
> "I have from the beginning found that without any lead from me, the branches of the Party in my division in Manchester share the views I hold. These views are consistent with the actions of a Socialist when the choice is no longer one between peace and war, but between peace and submission to the war-maker. Socialists always called for strong action by the Government when the weak and innocent in other lands were oppressed.

> . . . The I.L.P. now says, rightly, that Belgium must be freed. How can we say so, and then calmly leave that enormous task to other peoples?
>
> "I am quite willing to meet branches of the I.L.P. in Manchester, or the Divisional Council for Lancashire, if either gathering would be deemed suitable for discussing differences on which I am prevented from facing the Conference."

No action was taken on this letter. I continued my membership of the I.L.P. with scarcely another word of criticism or complaint from anybody. The I.L.P. had promoted me as a Parliamentary candidate in 1906 and later; I was therefore responsible to them. In a higher sense I owed responsibility to my convictions, formed in a distracting situation, and a duty to my constituents who, in the main, demanded a definite stand in face of this attack on our national life. 1915

There was no question of continued constituency favour, and neither by letter nor at meetings was any resentment shown at the course I had resolved to take. Indeed, when later I had finished my work as Food Controller, and a General Election took place after the end of the War, I was returned to Parliament without any opposition.

In May, 1915, Lloyd George introduced his second War Budget. The first eight months of the War had cost this country well over £300,000,000, and spendomania was as yet only beginning. In this Budget debate Mr. Snowden, on behalf of the Labour Party, brought forward a detailed scheme for a capital levy on wealth, but the suggestion was dismissed with scorn by Liberals and Tories alike.

The greater part of the national expenditure was on shells for our artillery; yet at this time the Army was suffering from a terrible shortage of ammunition, and in the Commons the Tories were pressing the Government for a critical debate on the conduct of the War.

Afraid of what this might cause, Asquith laid plans to form a new Cabinet by means of a coalition of all the three main Parliamentary Parties. It was said at the time that his hand was forced to this move by pressure from Lloyd George, who had threatened otherwise to split the Cabinet, and support the claims of the Tories who were clamouring for posts in it.

The Labour M.P.s met to consider the situation, and to discuss whether we should accept an invitation, should one be offered, for coalition with our political rivals.

1915 At this debate I spoke against any such alliance. I did not consider that our assistance would give Britain increased ability in the Cabinet, and I followed the traditional Labour view that we were in danger of being engulfed in the new Tory-Liberal whirlpool that was forming, and that we should then cease to perform the peculiar function in Parliament for which our working-class voters had sent us there. Our independence, in the long run, was our life.

I said, and the event proved me right, that we should not have access to the inner councils of war, nor be discussed when grave decisions had to be made. However, on the grounds that any split, however small, in Parliament would be a blow to British *morale*, the majority of the meeting decided in favour of joining the coalition for the duration of the struggle.

Holding the views I had expressed, I felt it to be my duty to return to my tasks in Lancashire as a means of avoiding being asked to take a position in the Government. I had no particular ambition to serve there then, and was well content to carry on other work which, to me, was service of no mean importance.

The pressure on Asquith became too great for him to resist. A week after making a passionate declaration in Parliament that a coalition was impossible, he formed one, in which Arthur Henderson, our Parliamentary leader, became President of the Board of Education, and G. H. Roberts and W. Brace, both Labour M.P.s, were given minor Government posts. Henderson also had a seat in the Cabinet. The new Government consisted of twelve Liberals, eight Tories, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Henderson.

In September, 1915, the cause of British Labour suffered a very great loss in the death of Keir Hardie.

Hardie died of a broken heart. He had always been a pacifist, and had fiercely opposed the South African War, being very nearly killed in Glasgow during a riot caused by one of his speeches there against it. Between the end of the South African War and 1914 he burned himself out working to try to prepare a tremendous international general strike, to be declared when the European War, which he could see was coming, broke out. This strike he hoped would paralyse hostilities and bring immediate peace.

When August, 1914, showed him that his hopes were vain, that the workers' leaders he had painfully taught were marching to war and singing their respective patriotic songs, and when British Labour refused to inaugurate a great strike on behalf of peace, Hardie became a broken man. "I understand as well as any man living what Christ suffered in Gethsemane!" he wrote to a friend at the time.

For the next twelve months the old dominant figure we had known was seen no more in the corridors of the House of Commons; he shrank into a travesty of his former self, never spoke in debates and said little to anyone. The first great leader of Labour was dying on his feet. We all loved and respected him; it was a great grief to us that our attitude to war was driving the sword into his heart; but between our conscience and our friend there was only one choice, and Hardie himself would have had it so.

When the news of his death reached the Commons, 1915 it was not the Labour Members alone who felt a sense of loss and loneliness; the whole House gave him a tribute of respect and affection, not lessened because the great majority of those present felt an absolute opposition to his views.

During that autumn the question of conscription was in every man's mind. Kitchener was crying unceasingly from the War Office for new recruits; from his bloody altars in Flanders, Mars was shouting exultingly: "More men! More men!" But still the men did not go out fast enough.

Labour had always opposed the principle of conscription as endangering the ideal of personal freedom; and we could not see why the bodies of the workers should be conscripted when the purses of the hard-faced masters went free.

To avoid the need for conscription many Labour M.P.s spoke at recruiting meetings. Some of the meetings were exciting; some were pathetic; and at them all appeared an ever-increasing number of listeners in the hospital blue of the wounded. I remember a crowded meeting in Manchester, at which my elder son, then a lieutenant, was present, when I made a presentation to Private Stringer, one of the heroic Tommies from Lancashire who won the V.C. in France.

At the special invitation of Mr. Asquith, Labour M.P.s went to a Conference late in 1915. This meeting I attended, when the Labour M.P.s and other Labour executives met Lord Kitchener and Mr. Asquith, and were told some very grave facts concerning the shortage of men in France. Kitchener was abrupt and uncommunicative; he appeared to be giving orders, not holding a conference. He looked on the War as a game of chess in which he was the player and everyone else merely the pieces.

1915 Shortly after this, the National Labour Committees and the Parliamentary Labour Party met to discuss the coming of conscription. I was present, and was impressed by the unity of spirit shown in opposing the Government proposals. The members at the conference represented about 4,000,000 workers, and strong protests were registered against national conscription plans.

The juggernaut of war, however, was not now to be stopped in its terrible career by the cries of the victims. The Government was drafting measures to put conscrip-

MR. CLYNES

With his elder son, Lieutenant Clynes, and Private Stringer, V.C., at a Manchester meeting.

tion into force whoever voted against it, and to collect up the conscientious objectors, the physically unfit, the shirkers or others, and cast them in their thousands in the path of the terrible machine which political mismanagement had set in motion. Statesmen and 1915 generals made promises which they knew would be broken, our little protests were drowned in the shout of men in battle, and the time came steadily nearer when married and single, young and old, would be hounded out from their quiet, civilised little homes, thrust into khaki, given rifles and sent forth to kill or be killed like the slaves and serfs of the world's Dark Ages.

Chapter XIV

1915–1916—Military stalemate—More shell scandals—Munition strikes—Taking a deputation to France—In the front-line trenches—Under shell-fire—A tour of the battlefields—Conscription—Parliament meets in secret—Lloyd George nearly lost with Kitchener—Peace overtures in 1916 refused—More Cabinet splits—Asquith resigns—Lloyd George Prime Minister.

When the War had been in progress about a year, and had resolved itself into a stalemate of flooded, battered trenches and deadly machine-gun nests, against which the wiser generals on either side became afraid to throw their troops, the character of the struggle changed. It ceased to be so much a clash between belligerent men, and turned into a competition between machines.

1915 Shells, guns, poison-gas canisters, gas-masks, food ships, food substitutes, troop-trains, ambulance ships—the side that could produce most of these things gained a momentary advantage, to be lost again when the enemy whipped up still more his feverish workshops and took the lead in the manufacturing race.

The more men who enlisted, the greater became the call for uniforms, equipment, bandages and shrouds. The War Office complained that it could not get men fast enough ; but it got them too fast for adequate equipment to be produced for them ! Nor were we in Britain manufacturing for our own soldiers only. Vast quantities of war material had to be sent by us to Russia and the East.

Swiftly as our mushroom factories shot up in England, the pace was not yet fast enough. The shortage, at various periods, placed our troops in dread of having to oppose German bayonets with their bare hands.

Much of the delay in our production of war supplies was due to sheer incompetence, but more of it was attributable to the will of the profiteers, who constantly deliberately kept the Government short in order that famine prices should be offered to stimulate their output.

Some terrible accusations were proved against contractors and officials in Britain and elsewhere during the early war years. Some of them held up shell production, and while our gunners in Flanders stood almost weeping beside their dumb artillery, hoping that the mere sight of the guns would delay the Germans a little, business magnates in London quibbled and haggled to extract the last penny from the national pocket. 1915

Thousands of the shells supplied in 1914 and 1915 were more dangerous to their users than to the Germans, and hundreds of our own artillerymen and many guns were blown up in trying to fire them. Other shells—at one time a very high proportion of those used—did not explode on arrival in the German lines. Army boots in some cases wore like brown paper ; bayonets snapped and new rifles jammed.

Meanwhile, men at the heads of great British armament firms were speedily becoming millionaires by betraying the common soldiers who were dying for them at the front. Wages in England rose quickly, it is true, but only the smallest and most miserly proportion of war profits was dispersed in this way ; infinitely the greater part of them went into the pockets of the capitalists, who were doing well out of the War.

During the summer of 1915, a feeling of anger began to stir among the British working classes, who were vaguely aware of what was going on. Wages did not rise nearly so fast as prices. Necessary foods, whose costs were sent ballooning by the profiteers, could not be afforded by men who were earning £6 and £10 a week.

Despite the agreement outlined in the industrial truce, threats of stoppages, and some actual strikes took place. All over the country, munition workers and others began sullenly demanding a fair deal. Within a few weeks, the results of these disputes on the output of munitions caused a very grave outlook in the Cabinet.

With the sanction of the Government, therefore, some deputations were organised to go to France and Belgium, to see for themselves the serious state in which our soldiers were being placed by the shrinkage of supplies of war material. It was felt that workmen in British factories could be told of what was wanted in language which they would the better understand, if men of their own class had been able to study at first hand the actual conditions, both behind the lines and in the front-line trenches.

1915 I was asked to lead one of the first deputations, consisting of eight workmen of various grades chosen from different big Midland munition factories.

For three days we traversed the battered and ruined battlefields of both France and Belgium, and learned at close quarters what modern warfare is like. In the course of our tour we passed through Ypres, once so serene and beautiful, but then a mass of pestilential ruins from which jagged masonry and the walls of smashed churches gaped heavenwards, like broken teeth from the battered face of a murdered man. Guns were emplaced beneath the blackened stumps of trees in a churchyard, and estaminets did a roaring trade with troops under the shadows of tottering walls.

I watched a British battery at work during a period of active bombardment of the German lines, and talked to the grimy gunners who served it. They were indignant at the stories of trade disputes in England, and more so at the tales of profiteering which had reached them. One of the men had actually suffered bad burns in the explosion of a British shell, which had become dangerous due to the use of cheap materials in its manufacture.

Every artillery officer with whom I spoke assured me that within the preceding few months there had been an improvement in the quality and quantity of shells supplied ; but one or two spoke very bitterly of days when their guns had been forced to remain absolutely silent, or had been able only to fire one shot of every dozen ordered. For every shell lacking at such a time, it was estimated that we wasted ten lives in the attacks that followed the barrages. Often, British soldiers were ordered to charge absolutely undamaged German wire entanglements, and perfect, uncrumbled trenches, when a way through the wire should have been smashed by high explosive and the trenches peppered with shrapnel, which contractors at home were withholding for their own purposes.

I saw some of the scarecrow khaki figures still fantastically asprawl over the wire in No-Man's-Land, and was told that some of those very men would have been still alive had shells been more plentiful. 1915

For some hours we traversed the trenches, several times being within a few score yards of the German front line—near enough to throw a cricket-ball, or a bomb ! The official report, issued later by Sir John French, described the German activities at the time as being " less active than a heavy bombardment," from which I assumed that it was a time of average military activity.

Long before we reached the front line we heard the distant " *Woomp !* " of shells exploding in the area we proposed to visit. When we got into the trenches that were actually under fire from the German artillery, I was frightened by the vicious whine of the shells, and the intolerable deep roar of the explosions, and wanted to put my hands over my ears to shut out the painful din of the gun-fire, to which our own artillery was fiercely replying. But, after half an hour or so, I found I could bear it, and was hardly aware of hearing it, just as one becomes hardened to the sound of London traffic.

As no shell had then landed near me, I hardly realised that danger was still present, and was mounting a firing-step to get a peep across at the German trenches, when an officer who accompanied me drew me sharply back.

"Don't risk it, sir," he said earnestly. "Those are Bavarians opposite—jolly good marksmen and always on the look-out. If you put a finger above the trench-top, you wouldn't have that finger any more after half a minute!"

1915 Twice, explosions took place very near, and once the cap of a large-calibre shell fell less than fifteen yards from the place where I was standing, burying itself deep in the trench with a heavy, dull thud. To be within a few yards of a falling shell, and see the weight of earth or stone or sand-bags hurled high into the air on its bursting, can never be made vivid enough by pen or camera; it has to be seen to be understood; yet so used were the soldiers to the process that they took absolutely no notice, unless the sharp cry "Stretcher-bearers!" rang out, to give notice that some of their number had been torn or killed.

The realisation came sharply to me that their indifference was simply a fatalistic acquiescence in conditions under which they were forced to live—and die. They probably liked it all no better than I did, but they had to stay whether they enjoyed it or not, whereas mine was the outlook of a man fortunate enough to be able to go away, back to England and quiet and safety. They could not go away unless they were first slashed open by shell or bayonet; and many a poor fellow, as he lay dying in the mud, let down the cruel barriers of self-control and murmured in a deluded ecstasy that overcame his last pangs and loosened his stiffening lips—"Thank God I've got it! This means Blighty for me!"

Behind the front-line trenches we passed through towns and villages, once fussy and happy, but now empty and desolate, mute testimony to the lavish ammunition at the disposal of the enemy.

I was much impressed by the burden of extra equipment that soldiers then had to carry. Rifles were being replaced by light machine-guns ; gas-masks were part of every man's regulation outfit ; the " tin-hat " was taking the place of the khaki cap as a precaution against shrapnel ; hand-grenades were stored everywhere.

The men, though some of them beneath their heavy burdens looked like human beetles, were singularly cheerful, and the officers I met spoke in terms of unqualified admiration of their courage, resource and cynical good-humour. Their food was rough, and only the rudest comforts could be supplied them ; their beds were board shelves, their dug-outs ill-propped pits with sloppy floors and garish-coloured pictures nailed on the walls ; while the trenches had obviously been deeply flooded in recent rains. Telephone wires ran like cobwebs everywhere.

Between the front line and the rear we had to travel 1915 through a sector that was under an intermittent barrage, and a staff officer informed us that we should present a smaller target and stand less risk of being blown up together if we journeyed, not as a compact party of eight men, but in twos, each couple of men walking about a hundred yards apart. We got through without casualty.

After an extensive tour of the battle front we entrained again for the coast. We were very quiet on the journey back. I suppose all of us were marvelling at the wonderfully intricate network of burrows, the maze of temporary railway lines and roads, the concreted gunnery positions, the infinite miles of telephone wire, the teeming provinces of rural country-side behind the lines that had been transformed into one gigantic, incredible, sprawling city, leagues upon leagues in length, where millions of men toiled through endless grinding hours, night and day, week in and week out, not to erect some splendid edifice or lighten the burden of human toil, but—to kill each other without personal hate, and make unseen women widows and unknown children fatherless.

Seeing the War at close quarters, it seemed the most stupendous and nightmare monument ever erected to the madness of the human race. Reflecting on it, I thought that the rhythmical roar of the wheels of the train that carried us every moment nearer to the little, quiet fields of England, beat out a sort of tune—"Humanity—insanity—humanity—insanity . . ."

"Ours not to reason why," however ; and on our arrival in England, we toured the smoking factories of the Midlands, and told the facts as we had seen them on the Western Front. We told of working-class men, serving guns in Flanders, who were dying because their own class at home followed wrong advice and took part in stoppages ; and at the same time I made it my business, in Parliament, to bring up again the question of war profiteers, and plead for a fairer distribution of the money paid for munitions, to remove the causes of industrial unrest. Production was stimulated, and something was done to mitigate munition profiteering ; and it was satisfactory to feel that many a soldier out there in the mud and wire was given extra protection as a result of our tour.

Meanwhile, the shortage of men for the Army was rapidly becoming critical, and Asquith, in spite of continued previous assurances to the contrary effect, introduced a Conscription Bill early in January, 1916. In order to cajole Parliament to pass the Bill, he gave an unqualified statement that there should be no extension of compulsion to married men ; that the Bill would operate during the War only ; and that those who objected to compulsion on grounds of health or conscience should be fairly treated, and, if necessary exempted.

1916 Everyone knows, now, how compulsion was extended very soon afterwards to married and single alike, and how conscientious objectors were harried, insulted and browbeaten, while members of local hunts and the sons of rich industrialists were exempted on the ground that their presence in England was an affair of national importance ! There were brutal travesties of justice, and innumerable examples of bigoted and cowardly

Jacks-in-office, " dressed in a little brief authority, . . . playing such fantastic tricks before high heaven as make the angels weep ! " Nervous wrecks, semi-idiots and consumptives, were forced by red-faced presidents of tribunals to get into khaki, and drag themselves out to France to die, cursing the country which had enslaved them in a military despotism, and in whose service they had been forced to swear loyalty.

In Parliament we Labour Members fought the Conscription Bill in all its stages, and the three Labour Ministers resigned from the Coalition ; but after Asquith had talked with the Party Executive and agreed to modify the Bill in several important particulars, the latter resignations were withdrawn on the ground that the news of them would encourage the enemy, and supply him with anti-British propaganda.

In April, 1916, less than three months after Asquith had given his guarantee that married men should not be conscripted, the Government decided to include them in the class to which compulsory military service extended. Once more British Labour protested ; and so grave were the Government fears of united Labour action throughout the country against the new move that, on our advice, a secret session of Parliament was called to discuss the whole situation, and before which actual figures of recent recruiting could be placed, without the fear of this important military data reaching sources from which it could be conveyed to the enemy.

Before this session took place Asquith had been compelled to adjourn Parliament for a week, because the split in the Cabinet over the new proposals had reached such grave proportions that no decided policy could be put before the House. 1916

During that week, Ministers met and quarrelled and protested, but some sort of makeshift arrangement was reached among them. The Commons met for the secret session with Press, public and officials all locked out, and grave deliberations went on within behind guarded doors. It was an eerie scene; voices giving vital figures echoed hollowly; but a case was made out which showed that, unless married men were soon called up, our front in France would be so weakened that the Germans must inevitably break through.

In order to give the second reading of the Bill a useful touch of sentiment, an M.P. who had joined up in the ranks came straight from the front and spoke in the war-worn khaki of a corporal. And so a new law was added to our country's charter, enacting that all males, from boys of eighteen to men of fifty-one, automatically became soldiers, and must fight, when called upon, in pursuance of any aims desired by any capitalist or land-seeking Government temporarily in power.

This law has deliberately never been repealed. It is in force to-day, in theory; and should a war break out to-morrow, every boy and man from 18 to 51 could be required to attest and go out, if necessary, to die in some European quarrel.

When the new Conscription Bill was passed, Sir John Simon, Home Secretary in the Coalition, immediately resigned, as a protest against the measure.

The cause of the Allies at the fronts was going, at this time, from bad to worse. We had suffered incredible losses in France, largely owing to the orders of archaic generals, who seemed to think that sending men to capture concrete redoubts, bristling with machine-guns, was much the same thing as ordering the storming of some North African hill, manned only by ingenuous natives with spears and knives.

1916 Russia, from whom such great things had been hoped, was trembling on the verge of complete collapse, mainly through lack of arms for her miserable soldiers. The Cabinet, after several stormy meetings, decided that Britain should make a supreme effort to assist her northern ally; and, as a preliminary step, it was decided that Lloyd George, Kitchener and others should go to St. Petersburg, to discuss with the Tsar and his generals the most urgent needs of the Russian Army, and extract certain definite promises in exchange for an assurance of millions of rifles, ammunition, big guns and shells.

At the last minute, Lloyd George and other distinguished men who were to accompany Kitchener on the voyage cancelled their arrangements, and the great Marshal travelled alone, save for his personal staff and a detective, up to Scapa Flow, where he embarked on H.M.S. *Hampshire*. Two days later the Commons was paralysed with the news that the ship had sunk, and that Britain's military leader was dead.

Exactly what happened is not known to this day. The destroyer escort put back to harbour owing to rough weather. Then the *Hampshire*, it is believed, struck a British floating mine, and Kitchener, after coming on deck, refused a place on one of the improvised rafts that were used in place of the boats, most of which were destroyed by the explosion. His body was never found. There were only twelve survivors of the wreck.

So passed one of the greatest figures of the War. 1916
Arrogant, determined, brilliant, he saved our country by his quick grasp of affairs in 1914, and by the enormous schemes for the mobilisation of our man-power that he instantly set on foot. Frequently, it is said, he came into fierce rivalry with his Cabinet colleagues, among them the Prime Minister and Mr. Lloyd George ; more than once his resignation was rumoured and denied.

He was essentially a warrior, impatient of all control by civilians, fighting ceaselessly and splendidly on behalf of the common soldiers, who trusted him blindly, and went to their death without trying to puzzle out the reason, taking as their whole creed the words: "Kitchener Needs You !" In the end he died for them as much as they for him.

After the news of his tragic drowning reached Russia, the fighting spirit of that country slowly went to pieces. To the Tsar, the name of Kitchener had sounded like the trumpet call of a rescuing angel. When the great general did not come, the result for Russia was "order, counter-order and disorder." The troops were driven to the trenches at the revolver-point, unarmed and half-starved. In twelve months the Russian armies lost more men killed than the British Empire did in the whole of the War.

Meanwhile, at home, the population were starving while the corrupt Court of St. Petersburg glittered and danced and intrigued, unaware of the inferno slowly yawning beneath its very feet.

The year 1916 saw the mooting of a number of tentative efforts towards peace. Fairly early in the year Mr. Snowden, on behalf of the Labour Members who had always advocated a peace policy, opened a peace debate in Parliament with an able speech, but found very little sympathy. He referred to a speech recently made by Bethmann Hollweg in Germany, which seemed to indicate that Potsdam might receive favourably any equitable terms for the speedy cessation of the struggle. But the general opinion of the Commons was that Germany would not, at that stage, consider any proposals which included the abandonment of her aggressive war aims in Europe ; and Mr. Asquith brought the debate to an abrupt end with a speech which conclusively cut short any ideas the German Chancellor may have had of preparing for peace negotiations. Asquith's speech, doubtless dictated by the strong war feeling of the moment, was worded with an almost brutal finality. He said :

1916 > " The will of the people of Britain has not weakened. The voices of the ridiculous minority who advocate peace now are like the twittering of sparrows during a thunderstorm."

A few months after this President Wilson of the United States made a great effort to induce the belligerents to lay down their arms and submit to negotiation. In Germany, this plan was very favourably received, and a statement was made that the Central Powers would, under certain circumstances, agree to a Peace Terms Conference, to take place at once in

America or in some other neutral country. But Britain and France scoffed at the suggestion of negotiations until Germany had been battered into unconditional surrender. A very impolitic interview was given at this time by Lloyd George to a representative of a great American newspaper, in which he said that "the squealing Germans" would get no peace till they had suffered "a knock-out blow," and that the British Army did not care how long the War lasted! This was taken in America as an insulting reference to the President's peace overtures, and opinion at the White House stiffened, so that Wilson was unable, for the time being, to do anything further.

During the winter of 1916 the Commons became aware that the quarrels in the Cabinet were becoming acute, and much anxiety was felt lest personal considerations and machinations to obtain influential posts might precipitate a political crisis, from which Germany would not fail to gain.

In December matters came to a head when Lloyd George, powerfully backed by certain friendly newspapers, demanded that a War Committee should be formed, to include three Members of the Cabinet, but to exclude the Prime Minister himself. As a result of this conspiracy, Asquith, who was not strong enough to throw Lloyd George overboard, sent in his resignation to King George. 1916

It was accepted, and Mr. Bonar Law was asked to succeed him, but refused to do so. Mr. Lloyd George was then offered the post of Prime Minister, and accepted without hesitation. Asquith's whole Ministry resigned with him, and the places were filled with energetic "new brooms" of Lloyd George's choosing.

The Labour M.P.s met at once to consider their position. I had voted against the first Coalition, but when a new one was foreshadowed under Lloyd George's dominant leadership, I voted in favour of it. The political and military situation had changed vastly in the interim, and our position was now so grave that I felt that Britain was more likely to find success under the vigorous guidance of a man whose personal political machinations I disliked, rather than under that of Asquith, who, while he was much more trustworthy, was also much more hesitant and short-sighted. When Britain had her back to the wall, it was not the time for us, in my opinion, to register æsthetic doubts, but rather to get on with the fight first, and split hairs afterwards. None the less, in common with most other Labour M.P.s, I disapproved very strongly of the methods used to pull down the Asquith regime.

In the new administration Mr. Henderson became a member of the War Cabinet of four members, whose duty was to conduct the war and nothing else. John Hodge was made Minister of Labour, George Barnes Minister of Pensions, and three other Labour M.P.s were given minor Government posts.

1916 At a meeting with the Labour M.P.s Lloyd George stated that, in addition to these positions, he proposed to allot to Labour representatives, very soon, certain posts in regard to mines, shipping and food control, and to institute a Ministry of Labour, for which we had been agitating for a long time. He was very cordial to us at this meeting, and seemed brimming over with confidence in his ability to improve the conduct of the War.

So Britain entered 1917 with a new hand on the helm, after having weathered a political storm that threatened, at one period, to result in the setting up of something like a military dictatorship. This, indeed, might well have resulted had Lloyd George's threat to resign, made just before Asquith was forced out of power, been allowed to come to reality.

Chapter XV

1916–1917—The Allies face disaster—The French mutinies—Kitchener and the tanks—An M.P. fires the Rumanian oil-wells—Unrestricted submarine sinkings begin—Wilson's peace overtures rejected—Britain faces starvation—Russia collapses—The United States enter—Henderson goes to Russia—Henderson forced to resign from the Cabinet—A London air raid—I go to the Food Ministry—Threats of bread and meat famines averted.

1916

At the end of 1916 the Allies were terribly beset. There had been 475,000 British casualties in a single sustained attack on the Somme alone—lives expended in a grandiose effort to send men crashing by mere weight through a line of steel. Nivelle, the French Generalissimo, whom Paris hailed as the new Napoleon, had launched a similar attack, lost 200,000 men in a few days, and been superseded; but not before mutiny had run like a plague through the French regiments in the front line. The men refused to face such butchery as Nivelle's orders had necessitated; the Red Flag was raised over the Cœuvres Depot; and wholesale executions of mutineers, chosen by lot to die for their fellows, had to take place before discipline could be restored.

In a frantic endeavour to distract German attention from the perilous state of the French Army we attacked at Passchendaele, pouring out our manhood till miles of the front in that sector was soaked with British blood.

The great military advantage that tanks might have given us, perhaps turning the scale of a battle that could have broken the German line in two, was wasted through the bigoted obstinacy of certain British generals, who opposed their trials over all save a small section of the front, until the Germans had copied our design.

These " prehistoric saurians with guns in their ribs, shambling through all obstacles," as Mr. J. L. Garvin has described them, had been given Kitchener's enthusiastic approval in their experimental stages. When he went with Lloyd George to watch the first trials in England, he hurried away after a few minutes as if he was not impressed ; but he stated privately that he did so in order to mislead public opinion, and so the better to preserve in secrecy his real approval. He gave orders then considered fantastic, as to the care with which the new secret was to be guarded, and ordered that the works where the new " caterpillar forts " were being built should be known as " tank factories," it being given out that the productions were huge water-tanks for transport use behind the lines.

Unhappily, his death prevented the whole of his scheme, entailing a grand mass attack with tanks and infantry, from being carried out till a year after the Germans had seen our first tanks in action.

During 1916, we had lost Kitchener, Italy had suffered severe defeats, a British Army had surrendered at Kut, and the British Fleet, in the biggest naval battle since Trafalgar, had suffered, if not actual defeat, at least a serious reverse, and lost fourteen ships at Jutland.

1916 Rumania, who had joined the Allies in August, had been smashed before Christmas. A German general led his victorious army into Bucharest ; another captured what was to Germany then an invaluable prize in the Rumanian oil-wells, whose products materially assisted Germany to conduct the submarine campaign that so very nearly ended in our complete defeat a year later. When these wells were reached by the Germans, flames and billows of black smoke were rolling from them ; they had been fired by Colonel Norton Griffiths, M.P., whom I had often met in the Commons. But they were not all completely destroyed.

While we were suffering these heavy blows from the enemy abroad, our case at home was becoming desperate.

Food was scarcer than ever before, and prices soared upwards as the shortage grew. Constantly, in the House of Commons, I called attention to the need to control the prices of vital foods, and curb the greedy triumphs of the profiteers, who stayed at home and lined their pockets by robbing the wives and children of the men in the trenches.

In December, 1916, Bethmann Hollweg, the German Chancellor, whom I had met when I visited his country just before the War, put out a feeler that might have ended hostilities, had the Allies, now almost beaten to their knees, been willing to compromise with their enemies. But never was Napoleon's complaint—" These English don't know when they are beaten ! "—more fully justified.

In a book by Theodor Wolff, who knows Germany well, there is this estimate of the German ex-Chancellor : " Bethmann Hollweg was no lion. He was a big, dignified watch-dog, a St. Bernard, who unhappily had not prevented the baby from falling into the water."

Bethmann Hollweg announced in the Reichstag that 1916 Germany had sent an ambassador to the Pope, and to certain neutral countries, asking for assistance in " entering now into negotiations for world peace." President Wilson, after receiving the German proposals, sent a Note to England, France and Italy, asking them their terms for negotiating with Germany.

These overtures were roughly thrust aside. The German offer was refused point-blank ; President Wilson's Note received a scornful reply, saying that peace terms would not be discussed till Germany had been completely beaten. Thus a situation which might have been turned to good account was changed, and more years of wasteful, useless killing began.

The immediate result of this haughty decision to refuse to consider peace discussions until a beaten Germany could be stripped of her Colonies and the map of Europe changed, was that our enemies started a last desperate gamble for victory at any price. They flung discretion to the winds.

Every German male between the ages of 15 and 60 was swept into national service. Those who were too weak to fight had to work in factories. Inhabitants of occupied territories were conscripted for slave labour.

In January, 1917, the German Emperor presided over a fateful Council, at which it was decided that submarines should sink at sight all Allied ships, whether war vessels or merchantmen or passenger ships.

" We will frighten the British flag off the face of the waters, and starve the British people till they, who have refused peace, kneel and plead for it ! " the Kaiser declared, before the Council broke up.

He went within a hairbreadth of his purpose.

From February 1st, 1917, Allied vessels were torpedoed sometimes at the rate of sixty a week. The oceans were strewn with wreckage and floating bodies ; steel-grey shoals of submarines glided beneath every sea, along invisible trails of death. Within two months, we were facing the most deadly crisis that England had known since the coastal beacons flamed out their red message of fear, calling all men to defend our shores against Spain's " Invincible Armada."

1917 Feverishly we painted our vessels with camouflage lines, to make the accurate aiming of torpedoes at them difficult ; but the sinkings went on unabated. Madly our destroyers scoured thousands of miles of tossing sea ; but the only result was that destroyer after destroyer failed to return.

Most deadly of all the results of the new submarine campaign was the sudden shortening of British food supplies. Thousands of tons of vital food were scattered on the waters every time a German torpedo found its mark.

At the Labour Party Conference at Manchester early in 1917, I raised this question of the danger of starvation being caused by the U-boats.

This Conference was notable for some exciting moments. David Kirkwood, who later on became an M.P., was present, and spoke angrily of his recent treatment in Glasgow. He had been accused of having engineered a strike there, and had been arrested one night and deported without trial to Edinburgh, where he was forced to stay, still without trial, for several months. He obtained a tremendous reception at Manchester.

Two months later Russia staggered from the side of her Allies and collapsed in revolution and defeat. Rasputin, the mad witch-doctor of the Romanoff rulers, had been murdered just previously, but " the evil that men do lives after them," and the Russian Army and civil population were starving as a result of some of his dictates.

In March, after terrible bread riots in St. Petersburg, 1917 public buildings were stormed by men and women whose fists overcame the sabres of the Cossack guards. Russian troops, tying red flags to their bayonets, sided with the people in the capital. At the front, the empty rifles were flung down, and great masses of grey-coated infantrymen surged across No-Man's-Land into the German and Austrian trenches, holding their hands above their heads, singing, and shouting that peace had come. Russia made a separate peace with the enemy ; after terrible vicissitudes, the Tsar and all his family, who had been made to shovel snow and cut wood, were murdered, and their bodies flung into a pit. From a welter of bloodshed there rose a new Russian republic, led by Lenin and Trotsky, whom the Germans had financed and speeded through Prussia, to the border, in the Kaiser's own secret, sealed, special train.

In April, 1917, the House of Commons was the scene of one of the most remarkable demonstrations in the course of its history. The news was announced that the United States had entered the War on our side. There was loud and sustained cheering that grew in volume for nearly ten minutes.

And, indeed, the change in the Allied fortunes came only just in time. It is no longer a secret that, had the Germans been able to continue their sinkings of merchantmen for two more months, at the rate they achieved in April, 1917, Britain must have surrendered. But the sudden acquisition of United States destroyers to the Allied sea forces, and the mighty convoys of food ships that began to stream forth from America's eastern seaboard, bound for starving England, just turned the scale in our favour.

America threw the whole of her enormous financial powers into the conduct of the War, with an initial vote of twenty thousand million dollars. The effect of this vote on the *morale* of starving, penniless Germany may well be imagined. But whether the United States could get her troops, tanks, guns and aircraft to France, before the Allies there had collapsed of exhaustion, was uncertain; and so began one of the grimmest races in history.

Everything now hinged on the speed with which Britain could be starved by submarine action. The world knew that if Britain had to make peace, to avoid bread riots, then the rest of the Allies must go down in unconditional surrender.

1917 In a desperate effort to revive the stricken corpse of militaristic Russia, the Cabinet decided, on May 28th, to send Arthur Henderson, Labour leader in the House of Commons, to Petrograd on a special mission. He took with him the option of dismissing the British Ambassador, sending him home, and if necessary taking on his £8000 a year post himself. This he found undesirable. Henderson was to try to win the support of the Russian Communist Party, then in supreme power, either to some form of armed support of the Allies, or at least to an arrangement whereby we could obtain vast new supplies of food and materials from Russian sources. Considerable bribes were offered to Russia, in promises of the expulsion of Turkey from Europe, Balkan and Polish reconstruction, and the internationalising of the Dardanelles, thus giving Russia a sea outlet on the south. But the negotiations came to nothing.

On his return from Russia, Mr. Henderson went to Paris to attend a conference between representatives of the Labour movements of England, France and Russia, whose object was to attempt to find some ground for peace negotiations acceptable to all three countries.

A little later a Labour Party Conference was held, at which I was present, to discuss the findings of the Paris Conference, and to consider the possibility of further overtures towards peace, which were to be examined at a forthcoming International Labour gathering at Stockholm. Henderson explained that he felt that he ought to go to Stockholm, and that to reject the invitation there would gravely offend public opinion in Russia. During his recent visit to that country he had been told by several prominent Government officials that they viewed the Stockholm Conference with favour; and if Britain wished to obtain concessions from the new Russia, this was not the time to flout their opinions.

But questions were asked in the Commons concerning Henderson's visit to Paris, and the tone of the Government spokesmen showed inexplicable sudden hostility towards him, though he was, of course, still a member of the War Council, and of the Cabinet. There seems little doubt that the Government had hoped that he would stay in Russia.

With dramatic suddenness letters between Lloyd George and Henderson were published in the newspapers, showing that Henderson had been forced to tender his resignation. This was a bombshell to all the Labour Members; and every man was in his place in the House when, before a packed assembly, Henderson made a personal explanation next day, having left the Government ranks and resumed his old seat with us below the gangway. 1917

After explaining the circumstances of the Paris Conference, he said that the War Council had known that he was going there, and had shown no disapproval. He went, he said, as a British Labour representative, not as a Cabinet Minister, and was within his personal rights in doing so. But on his return to England, said Mr. Henderson, the Prime Minister had said, in effect, that he must either give up his position as Secretary of the Labour Party, or resign his Cabinet post. Under the circumstances, he preferred to be loyal to those whose ideals he understood, and whose outlook was not subject to sudden and inexplicable changes.

Mr. Lloyd George rose and replied in typical fighting vein. He did not make points so much as score hits, by the use of the acrid badinage of which he is a master. But even his most ardent supporters in the House were left with an uncomfortable disquiet, and an impression that one of the crew had been asked by the skipper to go to the rail and find out which way the wind was blowing from Russia, and had then been followed and pushed overboard !

1917 It was within a week or so of this affair in the Commons that the War was brought home to Members in a very dramatic way. One morning between ten and eleven o'clock, a squadron of a score or so of aeroplanes came humming over Westminster. They were Germans. We were accustomed by that time to Zeppelin raids at night, but this was, I think, the first aeroplane daylight raid that had taken place.

Guns began to thud-thud and puffs of shrapnel could be seen high in the sky, but the raiders flew on without even bothering to alter formation. Soon, the deeper roar of bombs shattered the uneasy silence of the traffic-deserted streets. Within a few minutes over one hundred and fifty Londoners had been killed and more than four hundred wounded by the bombs. The raiders flew directly over the Houses of Parliament at a considerable height. I suppose they could not distinguish what lay beneath them, or probably they would have tried hard for such a favourable mark.

It was during the summer of 1917 that an event occurred which eventually brought me into the Government. As I have said, I had long pointed out the perils of allowing the nation's food to be distributed by private individuals, certain of whom were only concerned to line their own pockets by driving prices up to panic level.

So long as the nation submitted to private control of necessary foodstuffs, this sort of thing was simply playing into the German hands. The submarine campaign was sinking thousands of tons of vital food every month ; and with every ship that went down the profiteer sent his demands to a more outrageous level.

The war had become a struggle of mechanics. The nation that could build the most machines and man them longest would win. Every new demand of the Army authorities for bigger supplies of men and munitions to be shipped abroad meant less ships available for carrying food.

I had pointed out the dangers arising from these conditions, and did so more and more earnestly as the fear of national starvation came nearer. In 1917 I was appointed by the Government to act with about twenty other leading public men on a Commission to inquire into food conditions, and the widespread unrest caused by soaring food prices and vanishing foods. It was realised at last by the War Council that the armies at the front might conceivably be defeated by discontent at home—as, in fact, eventually happened to Germany ; and my Commission's findings were to be examined by the Government, with a view to immediate action being taken to deal with what was rapidly becoming a menacing situation in Britain itself.

At the same time Mr. Robert Smillie led a deputation 1917
to Lloyd George, which placed before him some very disturbing facts about food shortage. The Prime Minister's reply was to create Lord Rhondda Food Controller of Great Britain, with wide emergency powers.

He succeeded Lord Devonport, who had held the position of the first British Food Controller for about six months. His stewardship had not been satisfactory. A cartoon in *Punch* displayed the national feeling when it put into the mouth of the Controller the words—

"We don't exactly control food ; we give hints to householders, and we issue grave warnings ! "

Lord Rhondda was appointed as Controller on May 24th, 1917. A few days later Lloyd George sent me a telegram, at Lord Rhondda's suggestion, asking me to act as Parliamentary Secretary to the Food Ministry. I felt obliged to accept, for I had long been a critic of the Government in the matter of food arrangements, and a man who criticises but will not attempt to construct when he is called upon to make good his statements, is refusing a public duty. But for this conviction I might have shirked the very heavy responsibility which the new position involved. I was no more eager to take a Government post then than when I had discouraged other approaches previously.

Lord Rhondda's choice of me for his assistant was dictated by a rather curious chance. Some time ealier he had attended a meeting where I had to make a brief speech. He made a note of it, and though he saw little of me afterwards, when the time came for him to select a Parliamentary Secretary for the Food Ministry, he immediately submitted my name to Lloyd George as that of a man likely to be able to assist him in the new version of the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

1917 I started with a full knowledge of the gravity of the food situation. For years I had been in close touch with organisations of workmen ; I had known myself what it was to go hungry to work. I was well aware that lack of bread is the root cause of most revolutions, and that this lack could cause one in England just as quickly as it had recently done in Russia, or as it was yet to do in Germany. The Roman who said that a tyrant could do as he wished so long as the people got bread and circuses uttered a truth that applies equally well in the modern world.

In accepting my new post I did not escape minor pin-pricks from some few of my colleagues, nor from the protests of the Independent Labour Party. I had originally entered the House of Commons as a nominee of the

The Times "*History of the War*"

LORD RHONDDA
Britain's second Food Controller.

I.L.P. I now had the general support of the Trade Unions and the Labour movement.

I knew there would be opposition to my taking a Government position. I was, as I have said, reluctant to take office but I felt that I knew something of the subject of Food Control ; and the country sorely needed Labour assistance in a matter which so closely affected the working classes.

A letter came to me from the I.L.P. saying that attention had been drawn to my action. This letter read :

> " In joining the Government without having consulted or informed the National Council or your I.L.P. colleagues, your action is contrary to the obligation placed upon you as a Parliamentary nominee of the I.L.P." 1917

I sent the following answer :

> " I confess it did not occur to me to inform the National Council, or my I.L.P. colleagues in the House. I make no complaint that they do not consult me about the steps which they take, as they have often proclaimed their right to act entirely without regard to the decisions of their colleagues, or decisions of Labour conferences.
>
> " I thought I was acting in accordance with the resolution of the I.L.P. Conference of 1916, which strongly advocated the extension of public control, by means of Parliament, over all Government departments. The control of food by Parliament at this juncture is extremely important to Labour ; and Labour cannot shirk the responsibility for such control when asked to share it.
>
> " If the reply is that I am not acting according to resolutions of an I.L.P. Conference, my answer is that if absolute conformance to resolutions is set up as the test, many members of the National Council must be condemned for their strong resistance to your leading resolution on war policy.
>
> " Before accepting a position in the Food Department, I received the unanimous consent of the Executive of my

> Trade Union. This consent has since been backed up by the general approval of the branches. I received also resolutions of approval from my supporters in North-East Manchester, and from the Manchester and Salford Labour Party.
>
> "If, at a time when food troubles are so serious, I am to receive your censure instead of the help and encouragement which one would expect, I can only say that I have no personal regrets, and that I believe you are not acting in the best interests of Labour."

I had no further trouble from this source.

Even at this late stage certain people hardly realised how serious our food position had become. Many reports in the nature of secret statements were made, however, in 1917, and these revealed disturbing facts to the favoured few.

1917 One such secret State document showed that the President of the Board of Agriculture presented an alarming report to the Cabinet. This report showed that there was a world deficit in bread-stuffs, that the price of bread was likely to rise sharply, that the world potato crop had failed, that the world fish supply was expected to be 64 per cent below normal, that there was a considerable difficulty in regard to the supply of feeding-stuffs for cattle, that the difficulties of cultivation in Britain were steadily increasing, that much land was going derelict and becoming weed-covered for lack of tillage, that the yield of meat and vegetables was rapidly declining, and that live stock numbers were swiftly diminishing.

The general outlook, as shown in this secret report, was about as bad as it could be.

My new task entailed a tremendous amount of work and study. For fifteen hours a day, and seven days a week, month after month without pause or holiday, I had to master masses of food details and statistics, meet conferences and attend consultations, defend myself in the Commons against charges of cutting food profits till the producer ceased trying to sell, and at Labour meetings I had to answer on a count that I was protecting the profiteer and robbing the starving poor.

I had to stave off the imperious demands of all sorts of persons that existing regulations should be modified in their favour. There had been a world wheat harvest failure in 1916, and as the Germans had sunk hundreds of wheat-ships, our position was perilous in the extreme when I went to the Food Ministry. Flour was rigorously controlled. But all sorts of people presented special medical certificates saying that they needed more bread, and these had to be examined carefully.

On one occasion the Chief Rabbi applied for a heavy issue of white flour for the Passover feast. It was not possible to accede to his request, and we were obliged to quote him the precedent from Leviticus, when the Lord granted Moses a special Passover dispensation because there was a famine in the land.

Wheaten flour for bread was diluted, as the shortage became more acute, with the flour of maize, rice, potatoes, barley and soya beans. The greyish, husk-filled, sour bread that resulted will be remembered by any who recall those lean, uneasy years. An order was made, also, that no bread less than a day old should be sold, and all " fancy bread " was prohibited. Thousands of people sent us certificates to show that they could not eat " War Bread."

Horses ate great quantities of oats ; and, for a time, 1917
the Ministry was bombarded with letters suggesting the destroying of all hunters and bloodstock. In the end an order was passed permitting the feeding of oats only to " working horses." Dogs, too, were in danger of partial extinction. A committee was set up to study the question, and found that British dogs ate about 400,000 tons of meat per year. Dog shows were abolished, and dog-licence rates rose ; but Britain loved its dogs too well for further action to be taken.

To cause a still greater saving of foodstuffs, the King issued a Proclamation exhorting frugality and economy, and this was read in churches and chapels throughout the country.

One of the first problems which I had to tackle in my new post was that of deliberate profiteering on foodstuffs. Beans, for instance, which were being used to dilute the wheat in bread, rose to fantastic prices. Before the War Burma beans cost £20 a ton. In 1917, when I went to the Food Ministry, they cost £80 a ton.

One consignment of beans shipped at £36 a ton changed hands "on paper" three times during the voyage to England, and was priced at £93 a ton when it reached these shores. Consignments of butter, shipped from Australia at low prices, were worth over a million pounds when they arrived in the Thames. The enormous difference in the price went, not to the Australian farmers or shippers, or to the sailors who risked their lives to bring the butter here, but to speculators in the City who were gambling with money they did not possess.

Big fortunes were made by those who bought whisky in bulk in 1914 and sold it in 1916 and 1917.

In the summer of 1917 we found that prices exceeded pre-War level by 178 per cent in the case of sugar, 100 per cent in bread, 153 per cent in mutton and over 100 per cent in nearly all other vital commodities.

The sale of sugar had become a national scandal. Lord Devonport's department had approved a practice whereby sugar was only sold by grocers after other purchases had been made. This was stopped. But still sugar was a rarity. In February, March and April, 1917, the enemy had sunk nearly 50,000 tons of sugar, and for a period of some weeks only Ministry officials knew how nearly a complete famine in this necessity was upon us.

1917 About a month after my new appointment it was found that British meat supplies had shrunk practically to zero. Meat-ships had suffered terribly crossing the long vistas of sea from Australia and the Argentine; and home-grown cattle had been killed off, almost to vanishing-point, some months earlier, because it had become almost impossible to produce milk at a profit.

A grave emergency arose. Something had to be done. Something *was* done. A Food Mission was rushed off to

New York, with considerable powers, to purchase meat of any available description. About £200,000,000 worth of ham and bacon was bought and shipped at once to England. Famine was averted.

The next crisis was the threat of another bread shortage. Restrictions and evasions were useless—the need had got beyond that. The day was not far ahead when the British public, sorely driven to battle against enemy odds, would wake to discover that the bakers' shops were bare.

1917 Someone found out that the brewers had a reserve of two million quarterns of barley. Instant arrangements were made by the Government to take over this supply, more welcome to our harassed Ministry officials than the Manna to the starving Israelites in the wilderness. The country was safe until the September harvests ripened and were gathered in.

It may be supposed by certain cynics that the tenure of a Government post is somewhat of a sinecure, and that the Minister and his immediate satellites do very little for their salaries, except sip tea in Whitehall offices and make evasive statements in the House of Commons.

I can assure all such believers that I found my task at the Food Ministry not only terribly exacting in the length and quality of the work it demanded, but also painfully exciting. It was like playing a giant's game of chess, with destiny for an opponent, and the teeming millions of Britain's population as pieces. I had but to make a faulty move and thousands might have starved ; if my Department failed to foresee and counter every enemy move long before it occurred, then the game was lost, famine would run in terror from city to city, and the British Empire, unbeaten on the field of battle, would collapse from starvation at home.

Our work of saving food was pursued of bitter necessity down to the most trivial details. It became an offence to throw rice at weddings. Starch for laundry work was restricted. London's pigeons were rationed. The price of sweets was controlled. All stray dogs had to be destroyed immediately they were discovered, and the flesh fed to other animals or used in dog-biscuits.

A man who fed his pigs with bread-crusts, discarded by navvies building a new aerodrome, was fined £50. A woman convicted of feeding her Peke regularly with rump-steak was fined £20. Milk was controlled. A law was passed making it possible to inflict a fine of £400 on anyone found hoarding food.

Milk cost 9d. a quart, butter 2s. 6d. a pound, a chicken 10s. 6d., an ordinary-sized fruit-cake 3s. 6d., sole 4s. a pound.

And all the time haggard, tired women and white-faced 1917 little girls waited in ever-lengthening queues, with pathetic patience, outside grocers' and butchers' shops, easing one aching leg by standing for half an hour on the other, gradually creeping nearer and nearer to the entrance, only to be told at last, perhaps, that the sugar, tea or meat was sold out, and to have to move wearily away to another queue, outside another shop, possibly to experience the same thing again, and go home empty-handed to meet a bread-winner who was earning £10 or £15 a week, and had yet to make his meal from grey bread and water because the country he worked for could not distribute the food he needed.

The time I had foreseen, and prophesied in my speeches in the Commons early in 1915, when the nation's food would have to be rationed equally between rich and poor alike, was pressing close upon us.

Chapter XVI

1917—Lord Rhondda—A German *Lusitania* medal—Subsidising food production—Queues cause national panic—Britain nationalises food control—Food Committees—Ration cards issued—Preventing big strikes—World wheat and meat shortage—Food prices reduced—Wilson's second peace proposal rejected—Other peace proposals—Failure at Ypres—Caporetto—British rout at St. Quentin—German forty-mile advance—Haig's desperate order—" The Germans have won the war "—Alarm in Parliament.

My Chief at the Food Ministry, Lord Rhondda, was a man for whom I soon conceived a warm admiration and affection. He possessed a 1917 natural courtesy and dignity which peculiarly fitted him for leadership ; he was accustomed to great commercial undertakings ; and he had a habit of getting his own way without either dictatorial or Machiavellian unpleasantness. He made my task of obtaining the consent of the Commons to the measures which he thought vital, one of considerably less difficulty than might have been the case.

There was surely a touch of poetic justice in the fact that Britain's first effective Food Controller, the man who more than any other prevented the Germans from starving us into ignominious surrender in the autumn and winter of 1917, was himself one of the few survivors from the brutal sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German U-boat.

This great ocean liner went down in May, 1916, almost within sight of the Irish coast, with a loss of over 1000 lives. The 32,000-ton ship sank in eighteen minutes from the time the torpedo struck her. Mr. Winston Churchill, in his book, *The World Crisis*, has since stated that the *Lusitania* carried some shells and rifle-ammunition ; if the torpedo chanced to explode such ammunition, it is possible that the terribly swift sinking of the vessel is to some extent explained.

Before she sailed a New York paper published a warning, emanating from German sources, saying that the ship would be torpedoed.

The *New York World* newspaper published a cartoon, after the sinking, showing tiny children's corpses floating on the sea, amid wreckage ; beneath were the words : " Why did they kill us ? "

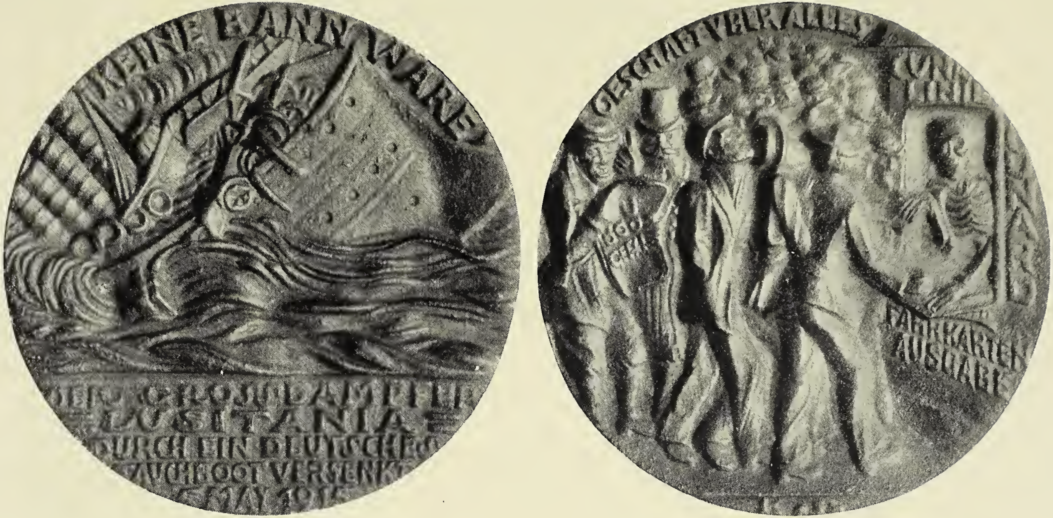
A curious echo of this sinking came to us at the Food Ministry shortly after my appointment as Parliamentary Secretary. A large medal reached us, having been found originally, I think, in the pocket of a German submarine seaman captured by a British vessel. The medal, which was made of some soft war-time alloy, bore on the one side a representaion of passengers in New York taking tickets at a booking-office to go aboard the *Lusitania*. Death was grinning in skeleton form through the box-office window, and handing out the tickets.

On the reverse side was a picture of the vessel diving into the depths of a stormy sea, her bows upflung, and more than half her length submerged. On the medal was a sentence in German, and the date of the *Lusitania* outrage.

This medal eventually came into my possession, and I have it to this day.

In July, 1917, Bethmann Hollweg stated in the Reichstag that, though the economic position in Germany was bad, ours in England was worse. There is no doubt that, at this time, the German political and naval authorities were shaking hands with one another in the assurance of Britain's unconditional surrender before the end of the year.

1917 But Lord Rhondda was already within sight of the turning-point where actual national famine would cease to threaten, though there would still be very great shortage for about a year. The price of bread was


KEINE BANNWARE!
DER GROSSDAMPFER
LUSITANIA
DURCH EIN DEUTSCHES
TAUCHBOOT VERSENKT
5 MAY 1915
GESCHAFT UBER ALLES
CUNARD LINIE
FAHRKARTEN AUSGABE

Obverse. Reverse.

MEDAL STRUCK IN GERMANY IN 1916 TO COMMEMORATE THE TORPEDOING OF THE "LUSITANIA"

lowered, and meat prices were reduced 25 per cent. These reductions, though the country did not know it at the time, were made possible only by Government subsidies, and such subsidies were granted, at a time when every farthing was needed to buy shells, only because it had become even more vital to still the rising panic in the minds of people at home.

Food queues, growing ever longer, were by this time causing terror to spread slowly through Great Britain. Gaunt starvation seemed to be casting off its chains, and not only workers and their families at home, but troops at the front, began to fear that it would soon stalk openly through the land.

After many consultations with experts, therefore, and when interminable mighty columns of figures had been transformed into technical information, most of it disturbing in the extreme, the first steps were taken towards widespread national food control. The State had to turn into a shop, selling meat, bread and similar necessities to forty million people ; and the change-over had to be executed at a time when the most violent forces of disorder the world has ever known were fighting their way across thousands of British bodies, ever nearer and nearer to the shop-front.

Our first step was to ask local authorities in all the 1917 towns and rural districts of Great Britain to organise local machinery and personnel, in the form of thousands of Food Committees. Each Committee was to consist of not more than twelve members, including at least one woman to represent the British housewives, and one Labour representative who could speak on behalf of the poor people.

Divisional Food Commissioners were appointed to supervise the Committees, and advise them ; and a legal staff was engaged to take charge of prosecutions against those who refused to obey the laws which the new move would necessitate. In the course of the next sixteen months or so, there were some 70,000 prosecutions, of which 93 per cent were successful ; and £420,000 was taken in fines, all of which went to swell the till of the Trading State.

In order to increase public confidence in the new move, I stressed that all Food Committees should work in the closest co-operation with women consumers, Labour experts and Co-operative Societies. The costing of the scheme was worked out, after innumerable weary hours of study of figures that danced and vanished and denied the conclusions of their fellows, like hordes of tiny sprites from some mad magician's brain. £1 a month per 1000 people under the control of the Committee in question was allowed to cover all expenses. About 2000 Food Committees were eventually set up.

Elaborate schemes of food distribution were prepared, by exercising certain controlling powers over the normal wholesalers and retailers. The costs of production and transport of essential foods were carefully considered, and the prices of the commodities were fixed, much to the annoyance of certain big speculators, who now found their golden activities rudely cut short ; and a coldly unimpressed police-court ready to receive them if they tried to run counter to the new laws.

The cat's-paws of certain of these speculators, and I believe in certain cases Members who were not innocent of moneymaking in this way themselves, raised heart-1917 rending complaints in the House of Commons, as to the ruin and disaster which would speedily face British finance, and consequently British business as a whole, if the new laws were not instantly repealed. Their sorrows were received in a grim silence by the majority of the House, who knew how vitally necessary it was to still food panic before not only Stock Exchange gamblers but every man, woman and child in the country found the larder bare and the shutters closed to protect the food shops from hungry, frightened mobs.

In the autumn of 1917 the first sugar cards were issued, showing the number of persons in each household, and having counterfoils to be detached and given to the shopkeeper from whom the householder wished to buy his sugar. The amount of sugar per head was, of course, fixed, and the householder had to register with an agreed supplier.

This initial card scheme did not work without any hitches. Mr. Lloyd George complained bitterly in the Commons one day that he had been unable to get any sugar that week because of some clerical error in filling up his card. A famous and elderly Cabinet Minister, whose name was revered in all Tory circles, did not fill in his age on his card, writing in the space provided the statement : " See any book of reference." This modesty as to his years caused his card to be sent back to him instead of any sugar.

Thousands of members of the public, when filling in their cards, entered the fictitious name and address shown on posters and in newspapers as a guide to the process. These cards were spoiled, and had to be replaced.

Most amusing of all was the story of a certain royal princess, who delayed giving her surname for some little time because she did not know quite what it was, and did not care to admit the fact or ask anyone for assistance !

1917 The editors of all the principal newspapers in Britain were invited to a London conference, in the autumn of 1917, when we informed them confidentially of the exact position of food supplies in Britain, and those available from abroad, and gave some idea of their eventual allocation. These figures could not be published, but the editors could use the assurance thus gained to check the wild rumours of shortage which the first ration cards caused, and to inspire a more confident outlook in their columns. They absolutely respected the confidence thus placed in their discretion, and a most valuable propaganda campaign immediately started, which had much to do with the soothing down of fear and disorder in the country. Our relations with the Press while I was at the Food Ministry were always most cordial ; and the newspapers helped us enormously.

In September, when I had been in the new harness about four months, I had to address several big Labour conferences on the matter of food supplies. During that month the Shipbuilding, Engineering and Allied Trades Federation called a critical meeting, at which the question was to be discussed whether there should be a universal cessation of work as a protest against high food prices.

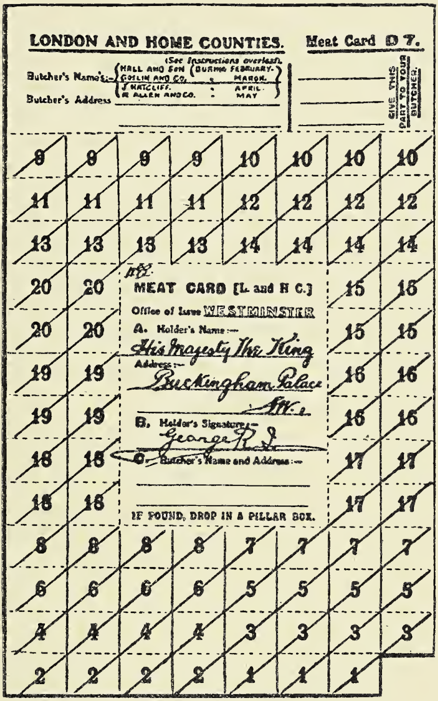
In the sore straits in which we then were with regard to ships, such a strike might have lost us the War.

I attended the Conference, and gave in great detail the schemes we had formulated for reducing food prices and improving distribution and supply. Eventually, the delegates, most of whom had seemed antagonistic at first, were satisfied ; a resolution of thanks was adopted ; and the big strike did not eventuate.

The year 1917 was another bad one for wheat crops in America. When the figures were cast up it was found that the wheat available for export to the Allies fell short, by over four hundred million bushels, of the amount on which we had been depending. It was also found that the countries from which we had arranged to buy meat were short of our requirements by just under a hundred million animals. The wheat shortage was overcome to a great extent by the self-sacrifice of the American nation ; every household in the United States was asked to reduce its consumption of flour by one pound a week.

1917 Meat cards were issued in England to deal with the growing meat shortage. Every encouragement was offered to home farmers to increase the numbers of their sheep and cattle ; and horseflesh was substituted for beef and mutton, not only in animal foods but in great numbers of butchers' shops. Australian wheat, as it was sunk in such great quantities on its way direct to Britain, was mostly shipped, instead, to Western America, entrained across the Continent, and shipped on across the Atlantic.

To tackle a sudden shortage which very nearly left Britain tea-less, this commodity also was rationed.



LONDON AND HOME COUNTIES. **Meat Card D 7.**

(See Instructions overleaf.)

Butcher's Name's:— HALL AND SON (DURING FEBRUARY.
GOSLIN AND CO. " MARCH.
J RATCLIFF. " APRIL.
R ALLEN AND CO. " MAY

Butcher's Address

GIVE THIS PART TO YOUR BUTCHER.

9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12
13	13	13	13	14	14	14	14
20	20					15	15
20	20					15	15
19	19					16	16
19	19					16	16
18	18					17	17
18	18					17	17
8	8	8	8	7	7	7	7
6	6	6	6	5	5	5	5
4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3
2	2	2	2	1	1	1	

MEAT CARD [L. and H C.]

Office of Issue WESTMINSTER

A. Holder's Name:—
His Majesty The King

Address:—
Buckingham Palace
S.W. 1

B. Holder's Signature:—
George R.I.

C. Butcher's Name and Address:—

IF FOUND, DROP IN A PILLAR BOX.

The Times "History of the War"

THE KING'S MEAT RATION CARD, 1918

Bread was not actually rationed to the public ; but its production, and the import and sale of flour, were put under the most drastic control. Less stringent forms of control extended over the sale of milk, bacon, cheese, butter, jam, oatmeal, peas and beans, livestock foods, chocolate and potatoes.

After a short period of nervous tension the British public began to crack jokes about the new ration cards, the queues shortened again, and—best of all—prices started to drop back. Loaves were reduced to 9d. as an initial step ; but even now the change was being made more for propaganda purposes than because we were out of the wood, and the flour subsidy was now costing the nation a million pounds a week.

The retail price of meat fell back nearly 20 per cent. Potatoes, in some districts, could be bought at a penny a pound during the lifting season. The cost of living to a working class family was reduced by about 10 per cent by the end of 1917. These were steps in the right direction.

On December 29th, 1917, a great meeting was held at the Central Hall, Westminster, at which delegates from the T.U.C., the Workers' War Committee and the Labour Party all attended, to protest against the suffering still going on among the poorer classes, and to demand further compulsory rationing. This was indeed a triumph for us ; for if only the country would *ask* to be rationed most of our difficulties would end.

I explained patiently to the meeting all the steps the Food Ministry had taken, and as many of the proposed future measures as might then be divulged. I also explained that we intended asking other Labour men and women to assist in the Ministry ; and, indeed, H. M. Hyndman, one of my most outspoken critics at that gathering, was very shortly to help us in our task of food control. 1917

Things became very difficult in the winter of 1917. Two successive bad years in the world's wheat lands had reduced world reserves almost to zero. At this stage even British Army rations were cut down ; and that was a grim admission of shortage indeed.

While I had been busy at the Food Ministry big changes had taken place in the aspect of the War. Another great peace appeal had been issued and rejected. It originated from the Vatican in August, 1917. It was couched in moving terms, and besought all belligerent Governments to deliberate on a way whereby mutual negotiations could be commenced.

1917 This peace appeal was powerfully supported by President Wilson ; but the British and French Governments heaped scorn upon it. Berlin and Vienna, after furtive discussions, realised that the choice was not in their hands, however willing they might now be to consider a cessation of hostilities.

In all, during the War years, about a dozen great efforts were made, at first by neutrals and later by responsible officials in Germany and Austria, to interest the Allies in peace proposals. All these attempts were abortive. Britain and France, whatever their aims when they entered the war, soon decided that nothing short of the smashing and disruption of the German Empire should satisfy them, and that all overtures should be contemptuously dismissed until Germany, on her knees, offered absolutely unconditional surrender.

After the first cavalry skirmishes in August, 1914, the War was not conducted by either side in a pleasant spirit. Kill or be killed, gas, butcher and deceive, or they will do the same to you—these were the standing orders among all combatants. The desire of British Labour to watch for openings for peace, and to formulate terms which would leave as little bitterness and fear as possible, was frustrated. Everyone knows how, when the time came, Labour advice was thrust aside by the arrogant shoving of generals and the crafty reaching of greedy politicians ; and the victors' one concern was to think out the uttermost limits of degradation to which proud nations could be forced to go.

Some such spirit of ruthlessness seems to have upheld the Allies at the three critical periods of the War when the Germans, had they but known it, had us completely beaten in the field. One such occasion was when von Kluck fell back from empty Paris in 1914; another was just after the final defeat of Russia; the third and worst took place in the spring of 1918.

The German High Command had decided, after a conference at which the life and death of the Central Empires hung in the balance, that the submarine campaign was taking too long to starve Britain into submission. At this rate the huge armies of the United States, already organised and partly drilled, would be thrown into the battle on the Western Front before "the damned English" could be forced to sue for peace.

One thing, and one thing only, remained to be done. The Allies must be beaten in the field before American aid could reach them. If necessary, three-quarters of the German man-power must be cast into the furnace of cordite and shrapnel, never to return. In a last gigantic gamble, more tragic and terrible than that last charge of Napoleon's Old Guard up the blood-slippery slopes of the hill of Waterloo, Hindenburg and Ludendorff made a lightning redistribution of their forces, and struck with a power of which no Allied general had supposed them capable at any period since the beginning of the struggle.

A British offensive at Ypres, meant to drive a wedge 1917
of khaki clean through to the Belgian coast, and thus to cripple the submarine campaign operating with that coast as its base, was smashed to a standstill in a welter of mud and blood; 230,000 British casualties was the price paid to make a small dent in the German line; the coast remained a distant, tempting mirage.

In October picked German troops, specially trained in mountain fighting, suddenly burst a hole, twenty miles wide, in the Italian lines at Caporetto. Two Italian armies were scattered in maddened rout; a third escaped only because it ran away through the mountains faster than the triumphant German and Austrian columns could pursue. British and French troops, rushed to Italy to avert what promised to be the final catastrophe of the War, managed to stiffen the Italians so that the invading hordes were first held and then turned painfully back.

Checked in Italy, the Germans swung their indomitable, battering forces back to our Western Front. Only a month or two after Caporetto, while the Allies were still licking their wounds, the enemy struck without warning at a weak point in the British lines, near St. Quentin, and created in a few hours the supreme military crisis of the War.

A barrage of high explosive, so overwhelming that big shells splashed down for miles along our trenches like raindrops in a thunderstorm, was succeeded without pause by a deluge of gas-shells. Ludendorff said later that the Germans had guns, almost wheel to wheel, every ten yards along miles of front. In a swirling green fog, so thick that soldier could not see soldier five yards away, the high explosive curtain lifted ; and such masses of grey-clad infantrymen began to pour across No-Man's-Land as had never been seen since the first months of the War. British bullets drilled three and four men one behind the other.

" You can't shoot them ! " wrote a survivor desperately. " It's like shooting to keep back the sea."

1917 Wave upon wave of grey, they swept through the British front-line trenches, past the communication-trenches, and left behind them the whole range of our defensive positions, coming suddenly to country criss-crossed with communication railway-lines, and dotted with buildings where our troops used to rest after relief from the front.

Our army under General Gough was scattered as no British army had been scattered for hundreds of years. Through a huge gap Germans were pouring, the infantry now being followed by rumbling guns, tanks, and feverish engineers converting our railway-lines for German use. On one side of the gap British troops were left raggedly, in terrible danger of being outflanked ;

on the other side, where formerly we had effected junction with the French, chaos reigned.

And still the Germans went surging through the gap, like water through a burst dam. Five miles, ten miles, twenty, thirty, forty miles forward they drove from St. Quentin ; nothing had been known like this since we were flung back from Mons. Everywhere British field-telephones echoed with the same frantic message : " Get back ! The Germans have passed you. Retreat ! Don't break the line. Get back ! Retreat ! Get back ! "

In ten days the British armies suffered 175,000 casualties and lost 1,100 guns. For two days the link between the British and French forces was ruptured, and on some miles of front the advancing Germans had nothing but stricken groups of routed fugitives between them and Paris. They did not know it, and paused to allow their communications to overtake them.

1917 Field-Marshal Earl Haig issued a sensational General Order to British troops. It read :

> " The French army is moving rapidly and in great strength to our support. There is no other course open to us but to fight it out. Every position must be held to the last man. There must be no retirement. With our backs to the wall, and believing in the justice of our cause, each one of us must now fight on to the end. The safety of our homes depends on the conduct of each one of us at this critical moment."

Nevertheless, it was due to the caprice of chance that the Germans did not finally force their way through. Unaware that they had won the victory, they delayed till French divisions had been flung into our bent and broken line. Violent attacks, regardless of cost in man-power, were launched against them elsewhere ; and the situation was precariously saved.

General Seely, Commander-in-Chief of the Canadian forces in France, said that : " The Germans had won the War completely, definitely and finally after the attack at St. Quentin, but they did not know it."

I well remember those dreadful days in the House of Commons, when even our strictly censored news showed that an appalling disaster was happening to the British forces such a short distance away, in France. We had not details, but simply ever-increasing rumours, which grew more grotesque and frightening as day succeeded day. And faster and faster came the deadly telegrams,
1917 to Members and their families and relations and friends, telling of youths and men who had lain down for the last time in the shell-slashed mud, pitifully attempting with their bodies to form a barrier of torn and battered flesh over which the almost irresistible grey German monster could not pass.

Chapter XVII

1918—Holding on—A war of starvation develops—Rationing to prevent revolution—A food crisis—Trouble with the troops—Reducing queues—The Food Council—The Consumers' Council—My tasks in forming it—H. M. Hyndman—German plans for causing a world wheat shortage—Shipbuilders brought back from France—My fight against British Prohibition—President Wilson's "Fourteen Points"—Labour war aims—The League foreshadowed—Allenby takes Jerusalem—Germany's dying struggles—The Aisne and the Marne—Paris shelled.

Despite our disasters in France and elsewhere, the temper of the British people and the determination of the House of Commons remained as resolute as ever in the early months of 1918.

Whether by the decree of Providence or by national bulldog pride, our country still expected victory as the natural conclusion to our war with Germany. This settled frame of mind was warmly expressed in a song that had been popular years before, when I was young :

"And when they say we've always won,
And when they ask us how it's done,
We proudly point to every one
Of England's soldiers of the Queen."

This sentiment was militaristic and perhaps not entirely praiseworthy, but so deeply were we impregnated with it during 1918, that we still fought on when the Germans were sure we had been beaten in the field and at home, and waited from day to day for our surrender.

1918 Never has our history afforded a more striking example of the national ability to "muddle through" than became apparent in 1918. The Government and the War Office had more or less "lost their grip" on events. They were driven on from one move to another by dreadful necessity, and with a dull reluctance, without any clear vision or comprehensive plan. As a bulldog, gory, slashed and blinded, retains its grip on a bigger and fiercer opponent till its deathless obstinacy wins the fight, so the British Army held on in France and Flanders, and the hungry, stubborn populace bore loss and disaster at home.

The maintenance of the people's larders had now developed into a problem second only to the military issue, if, indeed, it was second even to that. At this period hunger came within touching distance of losing us the War. Since apparently victory could not be won in the field, the issue resolved itself into the problem whether Germany or the Allies would starve first.

Germany starved first ; but it was touch and go.

The British temperament, so stolidly to be depended upon to endure to the end, was not such a satisfactory proposition when the time came to issue rationing cards for most of the necessities of life. Would our democratic public stand for such widespread, arbitrary control of the very food it ate ? Would it allow its appetites to be unsatisfied in certain commodities, just because an Act of Parliament said so ?

1918 I shall never forget an evening at the Food Ministry, when the rationing scheme was in process of being tightened up. The sunlight streamed blood-red through a long window, from amid a menacing, sullen bank of piled cloud ; it looked like a portentous omen.

" Do you think the country will put up with wholesale rationing ? " I asked, though I well knew its urgent necessity, and had advocated it since early in 1915.

" It's got to put up with it," Lord Rhondda said, sombrely. " Without rationing, we're done. It might well be, Clynes, that you and I, at this moment, are all that stand between this country and revolution ! "

The beginning of 1918 brought on a food crisis. Butter, margarine, tea and bacon had been much reduced. Smithfield Market, in coping with the Christmas rush, sold out its entire supplies ; and for a week or more it was perfectly bare of meat. The knowledge of this fact was suppressed, since, had it spread, something like a national panic might have resulted.

By combing the country we managed to get slender fresh supplies of beef which were exhausted in two weeks. They were followed by an emergency killing of mutton which lasted a week and then failed. But by that time a number of meat-ship convoys had straggled through the submarine-haunted waters around our coasts, and we were saved—for the time.

During the trouble at Smithfield some of the biggest queues formed that were ever seen in Britain. I well remember receiving news at the Food Ministry one day that a queue of over 4000 people was formed up outside the market, awaiting admission. This queue had begun to form at 2 a.m. on a January morning, with snow falling and the temperature many degrees below freezing-point.

Inside the market hundreds of butchers were queued up, waiting to try to get supplies from their wholesalers. All over London that day women in queues outside butchers' shops had to wait six and eight hours before being attended to, and seldom obtained anything but horseflesh even after all that time.

Chickens went up to 4s. per lb., and hares to 15s. each. 1918
The Times stated openly that the country was faced with a meat famine.

Nor was the shortage of meat our only worry. Early in 1918 a story ran through Britain that a bread famine was at hand. This reached the stage of a number of awkward questions in the Commons which it fell to my lot to answer.

It was my duty to give very reassuring replies, but all the time I was oppressed with the knowledge that the situation was such that, had details of it been generally made known, riots would certainly have occurred. Instead, we put a good face on the matter, held on grimly, and got through somehow to less straitened times.

A new trouble, however, now developed. Serious outbreaks occurred in France among the troops behind the lines. Rumours had reached them, very much exaggerated, of starvation in England ; and things began to look ugly when they held mass meetings to know why, while they risked their lives for their country, she could not even manage to feed their wives and children at home.

This discontent was tackled by the providing of actual facts concerning the food shortage, which showed that it was not nearly as serious as the wild stories that started the trouble had made out. Instead of being like sailors starving on a wreck, we were—as yet—more like long-distance runners on a diet calculated to make us capable of running farther.

Before the rationing scheme could be got into proper working order we had to master incredible masses of technical details of all sorts. One aspect of our work was to obtain what amounted almost to an emergency census of a nation of forty million people, in an unprecedented state of flux, swarming hither and thither to do war work, to train in military camps or to fight in various parts of the world, and see to it that what food we could obtain was distributed fairly among this moving multitude.

1918 The measure of our success in reducing the national fear of starvation may be judged from the police statistics concerning queues in the Metropolitan area. Just before rationing came fully into force some 1,340,000 people waited in queues during a sample week. Within one month of rationing the number had shrunk to 14,000, and more than half of these were waiting to buy unrationed articles. The speakers who had been sent to France to inform the troops as to our food situation, were now withdrawn, as no further danger was feared there.

At this time the Food Council proper consisted of Lord Rhondda and myself, and some eight or nine of the principal heads of the Ministry. We forgathered in council three or four times each week, and settled in a summary fashion questions which, according to departmental custom, would normally have entailed elaborate memoranda, references, the reading of dull minutes, and endless irritating and wasteful delays. These we cut away with a ruthless hand ; we could not permit formalities while the people starved.

I felt it advisable to supplement the masterly work of this " Council of Action " with another body, which I called the Consumers' Council. This Council, I think, rendered such service to the country that it deserved more credit than it ever received.

It consisted of representative men and women with proved administrative ability and wide knowledge of food affairs. They were drawn from working-class bodies, co-operative societies, food producers' offices and other expert ranks, and included persons as wide apart as Lady Selborne, C. T. Cramp and Lord Rathcreedan.

The Consumers' Council was a critical but friendly body. It had a constructive purpose. When it found fault there was good reason, because its members were in key positions to sense national causes for discontent or complaint. They were in touch with food committees, and with local authorities, as well as with consumers' organisations and working men's clubs. They were impatient with those who grumbled about trifles at such a time of national trial, but they were alive to the importance of their task as it related to movements in national food policy.

When I first suggested the formation of this Council 1918
to Lord Rhondda, he listened like one who hears something for the first time, and wonders. But after some reflection he gave me a free hand as to its formation and personnel.

One of the most powerful vocal critics of the Food Ministry at that time was H. M. Hyndman, whom I have mentioned in my last chapter. He had a world reputation as a Socialist agitator, lecturer and propagandist of some forty years' experience. He was regarded by a considerable section of Labour in many lands as prophet, expositor and leader.

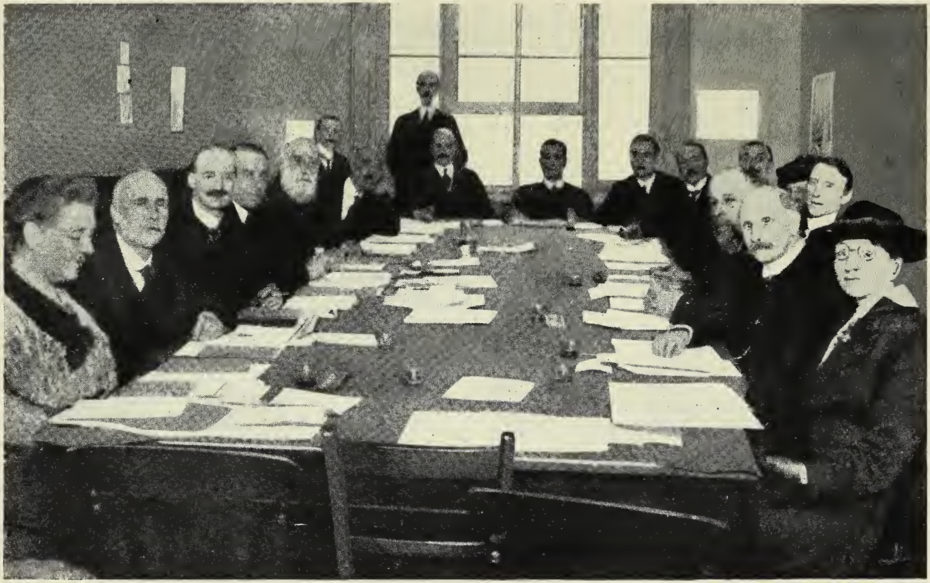
In times of disturbance he had more of the French than the British spirit for action, and he would think—and talk—in terms of a Committee of Public Safety, or a Revolutionary Tribunal. A " sea-green incorruptible " of modern Labour, he had a great gift for losing elections because he went to aggressive lengths to utter no platitudes and give no pleasing answers merely to attract votes; he was uncompromising to a degree that was sometimes more painful to his supporters than to his opponents.

It was such men as this whose service I was eager to enlist for my Consumers' Council. I approached Mr. Hyndman, and he agreed to join it.

I remember a typical action of his on the day we assembled for the first meeting. Mr. Hyndman commenced the proceedings by solemnly entering his protest against the Rt. Hon. J. R. Clynes, as a *Government* official, acting as Chairman of the *Consumers'* Council. I listened with respect to the objection, and answered that Mr. Hyndman's protest would be duly recorded, though even Members of the Government had to eat! I added that I was so overwhelmed with other work that I hoped to find Mr. Hyndman himself more often in the Chair at the Council meetings than Mr. Clynes.

1918 The fact is that Mr. Hyndman did excellent work through the Consumers' Council. The " Father of Social Democracy," though showing great determination and combative powers in pressing his point of view, demonstrated also that he had constructive qualities of real value, which he placed at the service of his country just when they were most needed.

He had travelled in many lands, and had visited Australia, and his outlook had broadened from the dull conservatism of the family circle. He had been the first Chairman of the Social Democratic Party, and had devoted much of his money and time to its interests. During the cult for Karl Marx he had turned collectivist, and had published a volume entitled *England for All*, and I knew it as a fine little book.



The Times "History of the War"

A SITTING OF THE CONSUMERS' COUNCIL, MARCH 20TH, 1918

Left to Right : Mrs. Reeves, Messrs. Watkins, Wilson, Syrett, Hyndman, Bartle, Sexton, Chard, Colonel Weigal, Messrs. Coller, Bramley, Carmichael and Dudley, the Countess of Selborne, Sir William Ashley, Mr. Stuart-Bunning, Lord Rathcreedan and Mrs. Cottrell.

Five members were not present at this sitting.

To a considerable extent he moulded the Party, and under his influence less prominence was given to purely political questions, and more stress laid on the right use of the electoral machine for furthering the social and industrial progress of the workers. The carrying out of the theories propounded in *England for All* became the policy of the Party ; and the growth of modern Socialism in Britain in its earlier stages was very largely due to Hyndman's work.

He and I were so very opposite in character and views, and had so rarely joined in any work prior to that in the Consumers' Council, that I felt great pleasure, at the close of my service, in receiving from him a personal acknowledgment, and also a public tribute, in the following extract from a newspaper article :

> " I would like to make it clear that on nearly all matters the Council and Mr. Clynes have been entirely at one, and great indeed is the admiration we hold for the excellent work he has done in his department. Mr. Clynes has rendered Labour very great service indeed by the part he has played in the war, and by his signal success as Food Controller."

Such praise from one's critics is tribute indeed !

The Consumers' Council played a great part in preventing and soothing industrial unrest during 1918. 1918
Certain of the reforms it inaugurated, in regard to cleaner food conditions and the prevention of dilution of vital foods, live on to this day, of benefit to the public, and, to my mind, the best possible memorial of that now-forgotten Council.

The Food Ministry's task was not merely to arrange for the equitable distribution and rationing of food. It was just as important to still the alarm that food shortage was spreading through the country. For this purpose I gave the activities of the department as much publicity as I could reasonably do. It was my opinion that the government of a democratic country should not be conducted on the lines of a secret service. Such furtive diplomacy had led us into the War, but would not help us to conduct it safely.

Even to this day British Government methods are far too secretive. It is wickedly unfair to the people if their endorsement is given to treaties of which they know nothing, as is at present often the case. Such understandings over military and political matters have been agreed to by the Tory Governments of the last few years ; these treaties will end by leading us into war once more, on behalf of some continental country, unless more daylight is speedily shed on our foreign politics.

The Consumers' Council afforded a means of publicity for the Food Ministry that was as good as anything we could wish. Representatives included many members of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and allied organisations, six Co-operative representatives, and three or four unattached individuals, under the chairmanship of Mr. T. Allen, who was eventually knighted for his services. Being obviously unprejudiced, what these members said about food control was widely accepted throughout the country, and swiftly eased all feelings of suspicion and tension.

When the War ended Mr. Hyndman ran true to form by marking the knighthood of his Chairman by a resolution that honours were a political abomination ; and another that it was wrong for us to send food to enemy countries until all our own poor people were given plenty to eat.

1918 We had many criticisms from the Consumers' Council as the quality of bread grew steadily worse, due to the adulteration of wheaten flour with various unpleasant commodities. But the war of starvation had taken a terrible toll of the world's grain, and we had no choice.

I do not think it has ever been generally realised how exactly and systematically Germany planned to bring Britain down by means of bread riots. A few figures may make clear what I mean.

Before the War countries that imported cereals had a demand of over 1,000,000,000 bushels of grain per year.

Of this quantity more than half came from Russia and Rumania, and the balance from North and South America, Australia and India. About half the total of 1,000,000,000 bushels was imported by Britain, France and Italy ; Germany, Austria, Turkey and Bulgaria imported about 170,000,000 bushels ; and the rest went to war-time neutrals.

To starve her opponents Germany closed the Dardanelles, thus shutting in the Rumanian and Russian supplies, and reducing half the cereal exports of the world at a single stroke. By invading France, she caused general mobilisation there, thus driving French harvesters to the colours and reducing the French home production of grain by 40 per cent—a want that had to be made good by added imports. This represented about 25,000,000 bushels ; and also the French crops of potatoes were enormously reduced, which further increased the demand for bread.

Germany's fierce drive into Russia, which forced that country to make a separate peace, gave the conqueror access to Russian supplies for German home consumption, and finally prevented the last of the Russian exports of grain to the Allies. The German conquest of Rumania did the same thing there.

Finally, the submarine campaign was aimed principally at grain ships, and was terribly successful. 1918

What happened was that the amount of grain available for export across submarine-infested seas shrank from the pre-War figure of 1,000,000,000 bushels to about 500,000,000 bushels, while the needs of the Allies and the neutrals rose, through various causes, from about 900,000,000 to 1,200,000,000 bushels.

The deficit of 700,000,000 bushels was met by emergency dilutions of bread, by giving Government subsidies to potato growers, and very largely by voluntary food economy in the United States, which produced a big surplus for export to this country. None the less, Germany's precise and gigantic plans to rob the Allies of bread came within an ace of success.

Even when supplies of grain were available for export it became ever more difficult to find ships to carry them. Early in 1918 the situation became so acute that some 20,000 skilled shipyard labourers were sent back from military service in France and returned to their job of building and repairing cargo-ships for food transport.

During February Lord Rhondda received a suggestion
1918 from the American food authorities that all brewing should be stopped in Britain and the United States, to conserve grain supplies.

Personally I was uncompromisingly opposed to this idea. To the working man beer is food, drink and recreation ; he takes it in moderation, and would fiercely resent any attempt to abolish it. The inn is his club ; very often he has no other place where he can meet his friends, since his home is too frequently nothing better than a collection of overcrowded bedrooms.

I was convinced that any attempt to prevent the production and sale of beer would lead to disastrous consequences in Britain, and probably in America. The failure of Prohibition there since, and the great wave of crime it caused, have shown that my opinion was correct. Vodka was banned in Russia just before the Revolution. There is no doubt that the working man of all nations needs moderate refreshment ; and it was moderate enough here during the War, partly due to the patriotic gesture of King George.

As a reflection of my attitude, and of a slogan which was attributed to me at the time—" More beer and better beer, and sell it cheaper ! "—an amusing cartoon appeared in *Punch*, in which I was represented with a barrel in one arm, facing Mr. Lief Jones, M.P. (an ardent Prohibitionist), who was advancing on me with dagger drawn. The cartoon bore the caption : " Further hostilities on the Home Front," and I was announcing : " Through my heart first ! "

Many irritating but perhaps necessary restrictions concerning the hours of sale of liquors had already come into force—indeed, as we all know, some of them are still retained to-day! For a time the output of beer was restricted, even for the Army and Navy; but eventually we won our little war and raised the output to a more normal level again. A certain amount of dilution in beer was ordered, which resulted in about 12,000,000 quarterns of barley being transferred from the brewers to the bakers, and a saving of about 300,000 tons of sugar, without any notable reduction in the quantity of beer available.

In one of the periods when the fear of bread shortage became acute, several experts said that the situation had resolved itself into a contest between bread and beer, and that one or other must go. Convincing figures were produced to show that the country could not afford materials for both. 1918

It became my duty on various occasions to defend a continuance of beer-brewing. I spoke on these lines both in and out of the Commons, in view of the reports I was receiving from munition works, mines, chemical factories, gas works and the like.

War work in such places was very exacting, and to numbers of men in the heavy industries on which the country relied, beer was considered a necessity.

Following a last and successful speech in the House, a Member spoke to me in the Lobby. He was known to be sympathetic, but was also an ardent public advocate of total abstinence.

"Clynes," he said to me, "you are upsetting many of your temperance friends. They do not mind you having to defend Government policy, or that you should state the case for the working man's beer—you have to do that, we know. But what *does* upset them is that you seem to do it with such damned wholeheartedness! You sound as if you enjoy every word!"

A powerful suggestion was put forward at this time from certain influential quarters for the State control of beer. The most critical period of a disastrous war was not, in my opinion, the time for any such gigantic change to be made, and I strongly opposed the proposals, which were subsequently dropped.

Early in 1918 President Wilson published his famous " Fourteen Points " as a ground of possible world peace negotiations. Briefly, these suggested a peace without annexations, contributions or punitive damages ; a return to pre-War conditions except that Alsace-Lorraine should be given back to France, and a free, self-governing Poland created. The world may yet discover how much wiser such a settlement would have been than the disgraceful " get-all-you-can " scramble which eventually took place at Versailles.

At a National Labour Party Conference convened immediately after President Wilson's suggestions were made known, British Labour called on the Government to make a declaration of war aims, to see whether they agreed in any way with Wilson's " Fourteen Points."

1918 In February, as an indirect answer to this request, the War Council at Versailles issued a declaration saying that " The only immediate task of the Allies is to prosecute with the utmost vigour the military efforts."

A debate took place in the Commons on this public snub to a great peacemaker, but no satisfactory conclusion was reached.

A last attempt was made to further Wilson's plans when an International Allied Labour Conference was held in London towards the end of February. France, Britain, Belgium and Italy were represented, and several M.P.s, of whom I was one, were also present.

At this Conference an important memorandum on Labour War Aims was issued. It said :

> " Of all the conditions of peace none is so important as that there should be henceforth on earth no more war. Whoever triumphs, the peoples will have lost unless an international system is established which will prevent war."

It was further agreed that an International Court of Justice should be set up after the War, and that States belonging to it should solemnly pledge that they would submit all warlike issues to this Court's jurisdiction. Thus the whole charter and powers of the League of Nations were anticipated. Our Conference also foreshadowed the useful work of the League in international labour legislation of various sorts.

It was suggested that the memorandum should be submitted to Labour representatives of the enemy powers, in the hope that a joint effort might eventually be made to gain peace on these lines, and it was actually sent a few weeks later, via Holland. But now the British Government stepped in. The Dutch Socialist leader, who was in close touch with German Labour opinion, was not permitted to come to London, and Miss Margaret Bondfield was prevented from going to America, to a great Labour gathering there, where the question was to be discussed. Leading German newspapers suggested that German Labour looked very favourably on the proposals in our memorandum; but by this time the War in France was turning in our favour, and the generals would not hear of negotiations, nor indeed of anything save a smashing victory, in which Germany should be forced to surrender on her knees.

With defeat and degradation before her, Germany gathered her dwindling forces for a last shattering effort in the field.

Already her allies were talking of deserting her. 1918
"Lawrence of Arabia," that mysterious soldier-archæologist, had driven his sword of forged Damascene steel into Turkey's side, while Allenby, last of the Crusaders, hacked purposefully in front. The latter had already taken Jerusalem, which he entered humbly on foot, leading his horse, at the head of his dust-stained armies—a proud conqueror paying his homage to that other, greater figure who rode that way two thousand years before, while the cheering multitudes flung palms and flowers to give him welcome.

Turkey was collapsing; Austria was starving and rebellious; in Berlin the people were eating raw swedes, and riflemen outside the city stood gaunt guard over diseased potato-fields, like scarecrows in the tatters of military uniforms.

In a last neck-or-nothing gamble Ludendorff suddenly flung a terrible attack against the heights of the Aisne, which the British and French generals thought to be so impregnable that they used them as a sort of rest-camp for war-broken regiments. The attackers burst a huge gap in the Allied line, swept across the Aisne river, wiped out a French corps and a British division, swarmed into Soissons, poured through Chateau-Thierry, advanced 30 miles in three days, crossed the Marne, took 40,000 prisoners and over 400 guns, and paused for breath less than 50 miles from Paris.

This time, though the break-through was absolutely unexpected and our losses appalling, we were in a position to counter-attack almost at once. French divisions, fresh from the rear, were flung crashing against the base of the huge salient the German advance had created. In front swarmed hundreds of tanks, staggering, crawling, and belching fire ; and behind them shimmered a great sea of bayonets. Thousands of French African troops took part in the attack, keening primitive war-cries of the jungle and using rifle-butts in place of wooden clubs.

1918 The Germans, with Reims almost in their grasp, plodded wearily back over the ground they had so hardly won.

But they were still near enough, even when the retreat stopped and the old, dogged grapple closed again, to bombard Paris ; and this they commenced to do with special guns built by Krupps for the purpose. These guns were 80 feet long, looking like titanic cranes ; and they flung shells 5 feet long by 8 inches in diameter. Such an unusual trajectory was required that the guns had to point upwards at an angle of 60 degrees. The shells took 183 seconds to scream through the air, 65 miles, to Paris ; and they created havoc there, falling steadily through each day and night for some months.

It was the great dream of the German High Command to force their way through to a point on the French coast from which they could fire such shells into English towns, perhaps eventually reaching London itself. Their experts boasted that the guns they were using to fire into Paris were capable of throwing shells over 100 miles ; and that still more powerful weapons could be constructed.

In view of these threats an announcement was made in the Commons in April that we were building similar guns, with which to bombard German cities should necessity arise, as a form of reprisal.

Luckily for London the fortunes of war were now 1918
turning so strongly in our favour that the threats of shelling London were dissipated, and the need for long-range Allied guns never arose.

Chapter XVIII

1918—Ostend and Zeebrugge raids to reduce submarine attacks—American troops in France—The Piave disaster—An American blizzard threatens our food—I become a P.C.—Death of Lord Rhondda—I am appointed Food Controller—Convoying the American Army results in a shipping shortage—Lloyd George saves England—Breakfasts at No. 10—Humour in Food Control—The Allied Food Controllers meet—My difficulties as Britain's housekeeper.

In April, 1918, the submarine menace to ships round our eastern and southern coasts became so intolerable, together with the national food shortage and the frantic demands of the Food Ministry, the War Office and the Munitions Department for more and more ships, that something drastic had to be done.

The generals had tried at Ypres to force a way through to the coast and destroy the German submarine nests from which the undersea killers emerged to harry and cripple our food convoys. Ypres had been a costly and terrible failure, and we dared not try that way again.

1918 So it was decided to make an attack by sea on the two most dangerous submarine bases on the Flemish coast, Zeebrugge and Ostend. In April, 1918, men, guns and a miscellaneous assortment of vessels, such as could temporarily be spared from the Navy and Merchant Service, gathered at Dover, under the command of Sir Roger Keyes. Old cruisers, private motor-boats, destroyers, ferry-boats, submarines and trawlers formed as queer a Fleet as any admiral has ever commanded.

After tremendous detailed preparation and some perfect rehearsals, this assembly of cockboats and obsolete battleships headed out into the Channel one morning in a driving grey mist; and returned again after having made a false start! A second effort was made—with amazing success.

The trawlers swept away the mines guarding the entrances to Zeebrugge and Ostend harbours; the motor-boats went humming in, sending up a smoke-screen that the Germans mistook for sea-fog; under this cover the *Iris* and *Daffodil*, hitherto peaceful workmen's ferries on the Mersey, but now crawling with soldiers and marines, chugged in to the heavily-armed breakwaters and sent landing-parties on shore.

Guns began to thud, shells crashed on the decks and sent up spouting fountains from the sea, motor-boats roared to and fro, the submarines blew up piers and smashed great holes in the sides of the moles, marines swarmed over the muzzles of belching German guns, slaughtered their crews and slewed the guns round on their owners. And amid the smoke of the battles that were all nothing but a blind, tired old cruisers, their work on the oceans done, loaded almost to the gunwales with dry cement, crawled right into the canals which, to the German submarines, were arteries of life, and there were sunk right across the channels.

When the raiders drew off at Zeebrugge the entrance channel was closed with the carcass of a sunken ship; and, at Ostend, a similar vessel lay half across the entrance, a menace to every German submarine. In memory of their part in the raid *Iris* and *Daffodil* were renamed, by permission, *Royal Iris* and *Royal Daffodil*. 1918

From that date the Channel began to free itself of the gliding grey raiders, and the Dover Straits were our own again. Food supplies increased, as more and more vessels ran the gauntlet of the lessening undersea craft; and the Allies were a long step nearer victory and farther from starvation.

In April, May and June over half a million American troops were landed in France. In June the German Foreign Minister stated openly that the Central Empires could never now win victory in the field. He was disgraced for saying it, but it was true.

One last despairing blow was struck by the enemy on the Italian front. Their troops swept suddenly over the Piave, and tore a gap in the Italian line. But now it seemed as if the very forces of Nature were fighting against them. With their victorious soldiers marching, to the tramp of warlike hymns, down the mountains into undefended Italy, the Piave suddenly rose in wild flood behind them, cutting off their communications, sweeping away their bridges and drowning hundreds of their men. They had to go back; the last real peril of the Italian battles was over.

One of the difficulties, however, of war on such a gigantic scale, conducted by untold millions on fronts throughout the world, is that no one knows how situations are developing, till, long afterwards, the dry histories come to be written, by professors who sit among their books and do not feel the throb of fear or the rush of the victor's blood.

In the summer of 1918 neither we nor Germany knew that the end was near. The British Cabinet was making gigantic plans for attacks in 1919, in which the Americans should be included by the million men. Our propaganda experts were trying to hearten the nation to bear yet another Christmas of privation and sorrow.

1918 The streets were full of mutilated men, creeping slowly about in hospital blue. The very character of the soldiers' songs had changed. They had started jauntily with "Tipperary" and "We don't want to lose You, but we think You ought to Go." By 1918 they had become pathetic: "Keep the Home Fires Burning," "God send You back to Me," and "The Long, Long Trail." But indeed, the endless columns of khaki one saw marching through London in the last year of the War tramped quite silently, more often than not, like men going to tackle a grim, endless task, which might some day, by the mercy of God, come to a halt, though never to a permanent conclusion.

These men were workmen, struggling and dying for a cause they did not clearly understand, because they had been told that it was their duty to do so. Surely, no one who saw them trudging down to the troop-trains, or their wives and children waiting nervously and often in tears for their return on hospital trains, can have failed to realise the need for a British Government of men of their own class, who would resolutely prevent any repetition of this blind and useless sacrifice.

As the winter of early 1918 verged towards spring, Nature, which was fighting so miraculously for the Allies on the Piave, turned capriciously against us elsewhere. A cold, wet winter had caused illness and misery in France ; but a much more dreaded turn of events in America gave the Food Ministry several perilous weeks.

A terrific blizzard, with unprecedented snow and ice, swept across the United States almost without cessation for six weeks. Forty-five degrees of frost crushed New York harbour in an icy fist. Of British ships alone, nearly 200 lay there, impotent as bubbles in glass, their food cargoes rotting in their holds.

Railroads were buried deep beneath ten and fifteen feet of snow, into which the ploughs burrowed in vain. 1918
All coal transport in the United States was stopped, and the factories on the eastern seaboard shut down for lack of fuel. So great was the paralysis that emergency arrangements were made to ship grain right round from the Pacific coast, via the Panama Canal.

In June, 1918, King George, on his birthday, raised Lord Rhondda to the rank of Viscount, and directed that I should be sworn as a member of his Privy Council. These public recognitions of our services in the Food Ministry were very gratifying to us both, the more so since we could now see a time coming when the daily fear of national starvation would be dispelled, as we hoped, once and for all. Gradually our supplies were creeping up ; in certain commodities we were beginning to establish small national reserves ; the rationing scheme had soothed away panic and ensured fair distribution of what foods we could obtain.

Now that we had time to breathe Lord Rhondda took a brief holiday from his duties, leaving me in charge for the time being. When he commenced his work as Food Controller in 1917 he had been a strong, healthy man. He worked like a giant at his new post, running his gigantic department and simultaneously constructing and adjusting it under conditions when one slip meant national peril, or even supreme disaster to the whole Allied cause.

After eight months of work the strain showed so that he was hardly recognisable for the fit, eager man who had been appointed such a short time before. His doctors urged him, in February, 1918, to take an immediate rest if he valued his life. Lord Rhondda reviewed the food situation, then terribly critical—and decided to carry on.

He took this supreme step calmly, with open eyes. Subduing his tired body, he continued a policy of swift and unerring action, mastering facts and figures which kept him steadily at work for fifteen hours a day, making timely decisions on which a great weight of responsibility rested, creating plans and building the machinery of one of the greatest organisations of the many that the War brought into being.

1918 Other State departments had their chiefs of staff, their service apparatus, their settled procedure and administrative and executive functions, already tested by years of peaceful practice. Lord Rhondda had to improvise from day to day, out of untested personnel and materials, and with national fear always urging him on faster. Everything had to be created out of nothing in a time of chaos.

The task was too great for any man. By June, 1918, when he agreed to take the postponed holiday, it was too late, and he knew it. But he could look round at the thing he had created and know that it was good.

At the Ministry we soon began to feel anxious at his absence. Then we knew he could never return. They could not even save him to a life of invalidism ; he had burned out his great spirit in national service. He died on July 3rd, 1918. Never has any man more truly died for England, so that others might not perish in a welter of rioting, hunger and terror.

Lord Rhondda had the highest qualifications for his task. His courage was unbounded, and he had a wide reserve of constructive ideas. Fearless in decision, unruffled in temper, and with a colossal command of detail, he was great in all respects but one. He was no orator ; his gifts of exposition did not always do justice to his work as a fine public servant. I had to try to do that in the Commons and the Country. His father was a grocer, but he never had the privilege, like his son, of serving forty million customers, or of quieting them when they were beset with the dread of not having enough to eat.

A day or two after Lord Rhondda's death I attended a memorial service at St. Margaret's, Westminster. I sat just behind Mr. Lloyd George. At the close of the service he wrote something on the margin of a hymn-paper, tore off the note, and passed it back to me. It was a request to me to lunch with him that day.

I duly went to No. 10 and found the Prime Minister in triumphant mood. We discussed the progress of the War, and he said that our recent disasters on the Western Front were only the preludes to a gigantic attack by the combined British and French armies. 1918

" Now that Foch is in sole command," he said, " we shall see things moving there. The Americans are taking their place in the line, and when everything is ready there will be a steady move forward that should carry us over the German frontier early in 1919."

We then went on to talk about the food situation in the Allied countries. It was improving, but was by no means satisfactory yet.

" I want you to take Rhondda's place," Lloyd George said abruptly.

I knew it was rare for a Parliamentary Secretary to be raised to the highest position and become a Chief, but my doubts were swept aside, and before the lunch was over, I had become the third Food Controller.

My apprenticeship as second in command had prepared my way for higher responsibilities, and I found my experience supremely helpful. I was in touch with working-class organisations, producers and shippers; and the machine Lord Rhondda and I had created was now running fairly steadily.

I was returned unopposed when I went to my constituency in Manchester North-East to seek their approval of my acceptance of the new post, and took my seat for the first time as a Minister in the House of Commons on July 17th, after twelve years as a Member. I felt a little self-conscious as I walked to my place, as one is bound to do on such an occasion, but the chorus of sepulchral "Hear! Hears!" that the newspapers describe as "Cheers" on these occasions heartened me for my coming task.

Although my department had weathered many storms, it was by no means in smooth water yet. Jellicoe had promised during the preceding February: "By August, 1918, we really shall be able to say that the submarine menace is killed." But this happy state of things had not arrived so far.

1918 By the use of depth-charges, lance-bombs, barrages, decoy-ships, detectors, destroyers and aircraft more than 150 submarines had been sunk by June, 1918; but Germany could build them faster than we could get rid of them. In April our average daily losses of shipping amounted to over 10,000 tons. In May the figures rose to nearly 12,000 tons, while in June and July this increased to about 14,000 tons a day.

Moreover, the rivalry in the demand for ships by our own Food, War and Munitions Departments was terribly accentuated in 1918 by the fact that Britain was responsible for the transport of by far the greater part of the first American armies to France. This migration of a people —for over a million soldiers were carried between

January and July—was performed with the loss of a single troopship and 291 lives.

But every thousand men needed annually 5,000 tons of food and equipment. Four million tons of baggage, guns and munitions were brought over as a first instalment with the first million American troops.

The British Navy provided 400 destroyers and 51 bigger vessels to guard these gigantic convoys of men and materials, as well as more than half the ships that carried them. Thus, our food-ships for Britain were tremendously reduced, and simultaneously our anti-submarine forces were perilously lessened; a fact of which the Germans were not slow to take advantage.

Bigger and faster submarine cruisers began to appear. They were of some 2,000 tons displacement, and carried two or three 6-inch guns. They could remain at sea for three or four months.

Before the War our merchant service totalled about 18,000,000 tons. By the early summer of 1918 this total had fallen to 11,000,000 tons, of which more than half was allotted to naval or military service, leaving about 5,000,000 tons to do the work that had needed 18,000,000 tons before the War.

Our Allies had suffered similarly, and they all seemed to think that maritime Britain could supply their wants or send them extra food in times of emergency. Thus, when a great part of our mercantile marine was diverted to tackle the task of transporting the manhood of the United States to Europe, the position of my department became for a time very critical. 1918

Next my office at the Food Ministry I had a cable room where a tape-machine did nothing but record the sinkings of food-ships. On some days the clerk in charge was ceaselessly in and out of my room, bringing me the names and tonnage of ships the news of whose sinking had just come through.

With the War Office, the Munitions Department and my own department reaching out like arms to get any and every kind of ship that was available, the time came when it seemed that the Allies could not build vessels fast enough, and we thought we had lost the War because the shipyards could not keep pace with the destructive efforts of the submarines.

It was at this period that Lloyd George was at his best and most brilliant. He had superhuman energy, was never tired, and himself did the work of ten men.

His habit was to meet the important Ministers of the Government at breakfast at No. 10 Downing Street, and at those breakfasts, which were in effect shadow Cabinets, he was most effective and impressive in dispelling the cold fear that had us all by the throat in those grim, dark days.

We all knew that England had plenty of fight left in her, but her stomach was empty. A starving land, like a starving man, cannot sustain a prolonged struggle.

Nor was the food situation the only thing that troubled us. Our field operations were still confined to impotent endeavours to break through immobile German lines ; and from each fresh assault we staggered back with a red toll of dead still further reducing our thinning ranks. We were crippled by strikes at home and disasters among our Allies ; munitions, coal, clothes—all were inadequate to the increasing demand ; and another dreaded winter lay ahead.

1918 Had it not been for Lloyd George's dominant personality, infusing fresh courage, laughing away gnawing fears, solving insuperable difficulties with a daring decision here and an impish suggestion there—above all, his amazing and positive certainty of winning—then I believe that England might have made peace on German terms within a few months only of Germany's collapse and our own overwhelming victory.

It must not be supposed that my early anxieties as Controller at the Food Ministry were entirely unrelieved by certain gleams of humour.

I shall long remember an occasion when I was discussing Army supplies with a certain famous general, and our conference was interrupted by the entry of a

MRS. CLYNES

Making bread in her Oldham kitchen during the war-time bread shortage.

clerk bringing news of the sinking of a vessel carrying hundreds of barrels of stout (then very scarce indeed) from a well-known brewery. The general listened thunderstruck, as if a major disaster had happened in France ; and then, in language I cannot repeat, told me that he could have forgiven the Germans anything but that !

One of the first letters I received among the thousands which arrived for me after taking office was from a woman in a Midland town. It set forth in detail that a nearby shopkeeper overcharged for various articles, and broke all the regulations of the Food Ministry. There were very heavy penalties for such offences, and the writer begged me to see that they were all enforced.

" If, sir, you take the proceedings which this case so well deserves," added a postscript, " please do not reveal my name, because the shopkeeper is my mother-in-law."

A still more amusing incident occurred in early July, 1918, when I had to go to Blackpool to attend a conference. The delegates were given a fish tea, on strict rationing lines ; and behold, for my sins, my portion of fish was so minute, so infinitesimal, that it wellnigh needed a microscope to see it. When I had eaten it, I called to the waitress privily, and said : " Might I have a second helping ? "

" I'm afraid I daren't," she whispered. " They say the Food Controller is present ! "

Towards the end of July the Allied Food Controllers met in London, and were entertained to lunch by the Lord Mayor. It was suggested by Mr. Hoover, representing America, that I should preside at the Conference, at which Controllers were present from France and Italy, as well as my new Parliamentary Secretary, Mr. (now Lord) Astor. 1918

Mr. Hoover gave us valuable figures showing how the United States was playing her part in the food war. Before the War she had exported annually less than 7,000,000 tons of foodstuffs. In the twelve months before his visit to London she had exported over

12,000,000 tons ; and actually in the next twelve months this figure rose to nearly 20,000,000 tons.

He suggested that the Inter-Allied Food Council, consisting of the Controllers of the four countries present at this gathering, should meet every six months to co-ordinate the Allied food problems ; and made several other valuable proposals, most of which were put into immediate effect.

One resolution passed is an interesting commentary on the general idea, held by leading statesmen at the end of July, 1918, that the War would continue for some years. It read :

> " We cannot administer the food problem on the basis of one more year's war ; we must prepare for its long continuance if we are to ensure victory."

Three months later the War had ended !

This Conference of Food Controllers cleared away many misunderstandings and suspicions between the countries concerned, and I turned from it to my routine duties at the British Food Ministry with a somewhat lightened heart.

I still had many problems to face. Vast armies of workers had been turned into soldiers, and production from the land was greatly neglected, despite Government inducements to increase it.

1918 Coal was urgently needed as one of the main sinews of war. All the coal we required was beneath our feet within these shores, and the colliers, who in times of peace we habitually treat badly and pay poorly, had become heroes. Too many of them, however, had walked out of their pits into foreign trenches, laying down pick and shovel to take up rifles on behalf of the country which had given them so little reward. Thousands of them had to be brought back from Flanders to the pits again, to meet a national coal shortage.

Yet, even so, we could get coal more easily than we could get food. Food takes a long time to grow. We could—and did—send more and more fishermen out to the sea, and they brought back quantities of wholesome food, when their trawlers were not blown to bits by enemy submarine-cruisers, mounted with ever-increasing guns for the purpose. But fish will not keep fresh indefinitely; and the distribution problem was a worrying one.

As an administrative machine, the Food Ministry continued to develop rapidly. During 1917 and 1918, we were able to enlist some of the ablest minds and some of the finest business experience in the country to assist us. Several Civil Servants of high quality, and many acknowledged experts in commerce and finance, at much sacrifice to themselves, came to us with invaluable knowledge to help to solve our hardest problems.

I had to reduce to six simple stages the path which we had to follow from the food grower to the food consumer. These were the task of buying food in many lands, its transport overseas, large-scale apportionment of food in bulk, wholesale distribution, retail distribution, and lastly individual purchase from shops.

To these duties was added the exceptionally delicate task of fixing prices, settling profits, and arranging percentages or payments due for the work done under these several heads by thousands of people.

Forty million cards of each controlled food had to 1918 be issued, and adequate renewal supplies of such cards maintained and distributed, without permitting any one person to obtain the use of more than one card. We had not only to feed the great civilian population, but to provide also for our Army and Navy. The problem was not for the United Kingdom only. It was one for all the Allied Powers. It had many difficult international aspects, and we had to keep in close and constant touch with America, France, Italy, and other countries, as well as with our distant colonies such as India and Australia, and with natural food suppliers such as the South American states.

I found the task of a great nation's housekeeper no sinecure.

With the shrinking of tonnage devoted to food carrying, owing to American Army transport, the prices of eggs, meat, milk, butter, margarine and other things began to rise again in the late summer of 1918, and the bread subsidy had to be increased. This caused discontent and uneasiness throughout the country.

A severe blow was struck to the Ministry by the loss of Sir Henry Thompson, our Scientific Adviser, who went down when the *Leinster* was torpedoed in the Irish Sea. He had been sent over because the Irish food situation was growing desperate, and he was a man we could ill spare at such a critical juncture of our existence. I then arranged to visit our Irish food headquarters in Dublin myself, but having got to Holyhead I was ordered to return to London and avoid the risk of crossing.

The winter of 1917–18 had brought an influenza epidemic that ran like a plague through Great Britain, and carried death to one house in three of our population. The doctors urgently warned us at the Food Ministry that the prevalence of this epidemic had been caused through poor quality food, and too little of it, and said that the 1918–19 winter would see an even more dreadful scourge unless whiter bread and more milk and butter at least were available. This was impossible, and we faced the coming winter with alarm.

1918 It was with great personal relief that I discovered, at the Trade Union Congress in 1918, when nearly every newspaper in the country was thundering against the Ministry of Food for not having filled the multitude with the few loaves and sundry small fishes that were available, that no adverse reference whatever was made against me or my Ministry, in this gathering of working men's representatives. I accepted this as an encouragement and an omen, and turned afresh to my task of preparing Britain for another winter of hunger and struggle.

This Congress was not entirely a tranquil one. Towards the end of the War, the Trade Unions and the larger part of the Parliamentary Labour Party continued to support the Government, but a stage was reached where the support of the Parliamentary Party diminished.

A lively and increasingly vocal minority freely expressed their views at Labour gatherings, and I had several times to meet criticism and challenge. This I replied to somewhat in the following form :

> " I represent the rank and file of workmen, and a distinctly working-class constituency. There are men who hold views different from my own, who also represent working-class constituencies. Let any one of them resign his seat, and I will resign mine. I will then leave to the other man the choice of the ground of battle, on which the rank and file can be tested as to whether they desire severance from the Government or not."

I did not elicit any response to this challenge. 1918

Chapter XIX

1918—Food Ministry routine—Air raid experiences—Germany in retreat—Mr. Henderson attacked—Bulgaria surrenders—Austria smashed—Ludendorff disgraced—" The Captains and the Kings depart "—The German Fleet mutinies—Revolution in Germany—Flight of the Kaiser—I get news of the Armistice—London goes mad—Foch's terms—Lloyd George decides on a General Election—" Hang the Kaiser ! "—Fantastic indemnities promised—Election sensations—Labour numbers increased.

My days at the Food Ministry were busy ones. I began about 8.30 a.m., and frequently worked steadily on, with brief absences for meals, until midnight.

Increasing day and night air-raids by German aeroplanes made the continuance of work ever more difficult and nerve-racking. Twice bombs fell within a hundred yards of us, and once a tremendous column of earth and stones poured upwards into the air less than fifty yards away, where a high-explosive bomb found a billet. By great good fortune, the Ministry building was never actually hit, and suffered no greater damage than a few broken windows.

1918 Several times, on my way back from the Food Ministry to my hotel, I saw heart-rending sights in the Underground stations, where I descended to catch my train. Raids were actually in progress at the time, and thousands of terrified women and clinging children, many of them weeping hopelessly, jammed and swarmed in the Underground subways and on platforms, trying to escape from the splintering glass, the racing anti-aircraft lorries and fire-engines, and the thudding bombs that disturbed darkened London outside.

People have forgotten now what a great amount of damage was done by aircraft during the War. Parts of Central London were plastered with bombs, time after time. Air-Commodore Charlton has since stated that nearly 2000 bombs were dropped altogether in Great Britain, a third of which were incendiary. One thousand four hundred and fourteen persons were killed, and nearly four thousand injured. Over £3,000,000 worth of property was destroyed.

Should another war break out this amount of destruction will be done in a single raid ; or perhaps far more, for no Government has yet discovered an effective form of safeguard against the bombing aeroplane.

My day's work as a Minister might be divided under three main heads. The first was to deal with my correspondence, meet conferences at the Ministry, and superintend routine work. The second was outside work, attending delegations of great business chiefs, importers, dealers and merchants, and also speaking at mammoth public meetings all over England, when thousands of hungry people came face to face with the man they believed had the power either to starve or feed them. The third was international work, meeting and keeping in touch with the Food Controllers of our Allies, and arranging the exchange of food supplies in adequate quantities.

In any time which these main duties left me, I 1918 spoke in the Commons on aspects of the food situation, and indeed was often severely heckled by critics who thought it easier to find fault than to suggest improvements. I had to keep the War Cabinet informed as to the progress of our work, the feeling in the country with regard to food, and the dangers of possible shortages. Local areas whose food-ships had been sunk had to have other supplies swiftly diverted to them, under a system of replacements.

If I ever suffered from nightmares during those years, I think submarines and mines must have loomed large in them. The seas of the world were infested by mines as if some gigantic and terrible marine creature had laid myriads of deadly eggs all along the ocean highways. An idea of the magnitude of mine-laying operations may be gained from the fact that the British laid nearly 40,000 mines in the Dover area alone. German vessels were everlastingly creeping through our blockade and laying new mine-beds or releasing floating mines.

In such circumstances, the catchword—" When my ships come home "—became engraved on England's heart. During this time my hair turned white.

In the late summer of 1918 no one in the Government had any idea that the War was to end within the next few weeks. The tide was turning in the field, but great German retreats were necessary before we could even claim that we had beaten the enemy back to the point where our troops first clashed with his in Flanders.

Two American divisions, coming fresh into the battle, broke a gap in the German lines, captured 15,000 prisoners and 300 guns. Ludendorff, harassed by a deadly absence of reserves, his war-worn, ill-trained levies reeling back before the pick of the American regular army, wrote in his private diary : " Our situation has become very serious. We have reverted to the defensive on the whole front. Our desire for rest has become urgent."

1918 A few days later the British advanced near Amiens, capturing seven miles of ground, taking 22,000 prisoners and 400 guns. Foch's unwieldy weapon was swinging forward in something like a death-blow.

The Aisne heights were recaptured. Byng's Canadians blasted their way out of the soured, scarred region where war had raged for three years, and found themselves sweeping forward over green fields and along unpitted roads. The Australians seized the key position of Peronne, by a midnight attack in pitch darkness that will never be forgotten for sheer human ferocity. Pershing's main army, preceded by thousands of aeroplanes like swarming bees, poured irresistibly forward, taking 15,000 prisoners and 400 guns, and pausing only before the frowning frontier fortress of Metz.

But these disasters were no greater than some that the Allies had suffered. We knew the quality of the German soldier too well to dream for one moment that he was finally vanquished in the field, merely because he had lost a few miles of ground, and some prisoners and guns.

A well-informed source of information, printed in October, 1918, stated :

> " Germany's armies are not yet broken in the military sense. In 1919, fighting, in all human probability, will be intense, and may be prolonged . . ."

At the Food Ministry in October we were arranging to ensure our quota of food-ships on the footing that the winter of 1918–19 would be used as a time of intense preparation on the western front for heavy fighting in the spring of 1919. This meant that the War and Munitions Departments would intensify their demands for tonnage, to our coming embarrassment. We were arranging to get 20,000,000 tons of foodstuffs from America alone, as ships became available, with which to feed fighting Britain for another year.

The stubborn determination to win the War at any 1918
cost was still very high in England. In October, Mr. Henderson and others boarded a cross-Channel boat at Folkestone, wishing to go to Paris to attend an International Labour gathering, where a basis for future peace terms was to be discussed. But there was a mutiny aboard the ship. The sailors flatly refused to go to their stations while Henderson was aboard, or anyone else who held peaceful views.

The delegates were driven from the vessel amid ferocious threats and vile abuse, and carried their luggage by hand back to the Central Station, where they boarded a train for London. But crowds followed and threatened to wreck the train ; and only with the greatest difficulty was the line cleared for it to steam out Londonwards.

Meanwhile our work at the Food Ministry went on unchanged. The grim sense of "holding on" still ruled throughout the country; there were women conductors on public vehicles, women on the land, and pigtailed "flappers" in every office; in the House of Commons numbers of new faces showed where over a score of M.P.s had gone to swell the ever-growing death-lists from the battle fronts.

The Germans were retreating doggedly in France, plodding back grimly and in silence, solid and orderly, finer perhaps in the agony of interminable defeat than they were even in their brilliant victories. It was reported that they had built an impenetrable series of mighty redoubts along the line of Antwerp, Brussels, Sedan and Metz—and we who had battered uselessly for years at the Hindenburg Line knew the methodical thoroughness of the German engineers.

Overtures towards peace were made from Germany in the autumn of 1918, but many such overtures had been made during the preceding two years, as I have told; and we did not dream that the end was actually upon them. The Kaiser tried to gain the assistance of the Queen of Holland, and then sent a Note to President Wilson suggesting some sort of peace negotiations, possibly on the basis of the Fourteen Points. There was some discussion, but nothing came of it for a time.

And then the resistance of the Central Empires suddenly snapped. Bulgaria, smashed by a swift and terrible offensive, signed a separate peace. Turkey was collapsing, and her envoys were seeking peace at any price.

1918 Austria, stiffened by German troops, tried to stand firm, but the Italians rose along the Piave, and, in a single irresistible thrust, poured through the enemy lines, and achieved the greatest triumph of the War, capturing half a million prisoners and 7000 guns. The whole Austrian Army crumpled; defeat was turned to rout and rout to mutiny ; while at home in Vienna mutiny turned to a general revolt, in which the Hapsburg monarchy was swept away for ever.

In France the Americans performed a forced march after the retreating German armies, covering the incredible distance of 40 miles in 30 hours. The Belgians, cooped up behind their dykes for four years, came sweeping forward, an avenging host, and harassed the bitter German retreat. British aeroplanes whipped the grey columns with machine-gun bullets, and on Sunday, November 10th, British cavalry, on horseback again for the first time since quitting that town in 1914 after their first clash of the War, clattered through the cobbled streets of Mons.

In the ears of Hindenburg and Ludendorff there sounded the roaring of the abyss. Ludendorff appealed to the German Army, now holding an impregnable position along a new and mighty defensive line, not to surrender to terms made by German politicians. The Army heard him in bewilderment and did not obey ; and the great general was disgraced and dismissed.

" In a fortnight there will not be an Emperor ! " he said angrily, when the Kaiser's decree of dismissal was given him.

He fled with a forged passport and green spectacles into Sweden. Von Turpitz shaved off his famous beard and escaped to Holland. Von Ballin, the Kaiser's personal adviser, shot himself. Hindenburg, weary and defeated, simply went to his home in Hanover and waited for whatever punishment might come to him.

The Kaiser, deserted and terrified, ordered the High Seas Fleet—that ponderous weapon built as his answer to Britain's pre-War dreadnought race—to emerge from Kiel and risk the fate of an empire on a life-or-death grapple with the Grand Fleet in the North Sea. Such a gamble might still have brought victory. 1918

But a trembling Secretary came to the Kaiser next day and, with tears in his eyes, announced that the German Fleet had mutinied, that its flagship, the *Kaiser*, had run up the Red Flag, and that revolution and anarchy were sweeping through the starving and distracted German towns.

The War Lord whose word, four years before, had struck terror into the heart of a breathless world, shut himself up alone in a State apartment. Personal retainers called to him through the door not to kill himself, but he gave no answer. Presently he came out, signed his abdication with a trembling hand, boarded a waiting motor-car and fled through the night to Holland, passing on his way through German towns where the maddened populace was burning furniture and singing the *Carmagnole*.

In London the Goverment knew that Germany was cracking, but we dreaded to hope too soon that the War was really ending. The War Cabinet held feverish meetings, and the Commons was in a state of dreadful suspense, never surpassed in any period of defeat.

I was sitting at my desk in the Food Ministry offices about midday on November 11th when a swift knocking on the door was followed by the sudden entrance of one of my private secretaries, before I could even call to him to come in.

"It's all over, sir!" he gasped. "The War's over!"

I don't think much more work was done that day. The whole of London went mad. I went on with my job. The War had ended but appetites remained.

The first maroons sounded a few minutes after I received the news—maroons not to warn us against raiding aircraft, but to announce that we had finished with all that sort of thing (as we hoped) for ever, that there would be no more dread telegrams bearing the stunning message of death, and that the War regulations, which had grown into everyday routine, would be relaxed.

1918 People received the news in different ways. Some were grimly humorous, others wept openly with relief. But many were apathetic. Perhaps they had lost all they had to lose already, in the shell-flayed mud of Flanders.

During the afternoon great mobs of cheering people raced past the Food Ministry building, and the contagion of rejoicing began to spread. In the streets, stranger linked arm with stranger ; the girl conductors on the buses were kissed by the passengers, and in order to regain order enough to allow the buses to proceed, they began throwing down the hats of men passengers into the road, hoping that the men would go after their hats. They did not do so—they let their hats lie, and shouting multitudes swept over them and trampled them flat.

That night, as it grew dark, there were gigantic bonfires in Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus and dozens of other places in London. These bonfires were generously fed with furniture, prams, even overcoats and jackets from those who attended them. The streets, after two years of nightly darkness and dread, blazed once more with gas and electric light ; and more and more great bonfires of joy sent leaping red tongues of flame heavenwards in the lurid London skies.

It was impossible to make coherent headway against the mobs on the pavements that night ; one was swept along with the crowd till it met a bigger crowd, and then the latter took charge of the direction, and no one could escape from the power of the new torrent of humanity.

I had to go miles out of my way in my car, in order to get quite a short distance from the Food Ministry to my hotel, because the roads were pouring with wildly joyous people. Hysteria reigned unchecked.

Later, in the Commons, we tried to piece together 1918 what had happened. We heard how German delegates had been passed through the French fighting lines, and had been received by Marshal Foch in the old railway carriage he was using as a temporary G.H.Q. They came to discuss peace terms, but Foch told them brutally that they could surrender at once unconditionally, suffer military annihilation, commercial destruction and Colonial dismemberment—or be smashed with high explosive until they did so.

"If you do not care to agree here, gentlemen," he said laconically, "you will do so in Berlin when my armies arrive there."

They agreed to terrible terms. Within two weeks they were to quit France, Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine. They must surrender 2000 aeroplanes, 30,000 machine-guns, 5000 field-guns, 3000 trench mortars, 5000 railway engines, 150,000 military wagons, 5000 lorries and 150 submarines. They must evacuate all Germany as far as the Rhine, and allow Allied troops to penetrate beyond that river.

The whole German Navy was to be given up to the Allies. They must surrender all territory on other fronts won by them during the War. In terms of colonies, ships, coal, machinery and money, they must pay an unnamed sum in indemnities that—so it was fondly hoped—would neutralise the entire cost of the war to all the Allies, and leave them financially in pocket.

These terms, particularly those concerning indemnities, were ridiculous. They were childish. No nation or group of nations could have paid for the cost of the War without support from the entire financial world. But Foch was no statesman—he was a wonderful soldier, but a child in finance and politics.

The battle was over. The smoke of the guns wreathed sullenly away from the fields of France and Flanders. The German regiments left their defensive line, and marched back with colours flying and bands playing towards Berlin—just as they had come, save that the returning armies were composed not of brown-faced veterans but of limping boys and sunken-cheeked old men.

1918 Over ten million people had been killed in four years of fighting. Twenty-five million more had died from indirect causes such as starvation and disease. Sixty million more were crippled, imbecile, tubercular or shell-shocked.

Why? I'm afraid no one can quite say. But—" It was a mighty victory ! "

The world to-day is arming for another such war.

During the afternoon of November 11th, Mr. Lloyd George read to a breathless House of Commons the provisional terms of the Armistice. The speech was followed by scenes, not of wild enthusiasm such as we had witnessed in the streets outside, but of tired relief. Tears were seen on the faces of some of the Members.

As I watched the emotions of my colleagues, and listened to the subdued speeches, the thought came vividly to me what the Germans in the Reichstag must be feeling that day, and how very nearly the positions had been reversed and the British Parliament been obliged to discuss, in awe and unbelief, terms dictated to the vanquished by the conquerors.

One at least of us, however, was far-sighted enough to consider the political chances of this sudden victory. The Prime Minister, even while the maroons were still booming out their rejoicing notes, was planning with some of his friends the tactics for a snap khaki General Election. This was in direct contravention to the agreement between all political parties that Party affairs should be forgotten till peace was restored. The Peace was not signed till the end of 1919 ; but Mr. Lloyd George had no wish to wait for an electoral appeal until the hysteria of victory had abated, and been followed by a relapse among unhappy post-War facts.

> " We must not allow any sense of revenge, any spirit of greed, any grasping desire to overrule the fundamental principles of righteousness. . . . We must relentlessly set our faces against base, sordid, squalid ideas of vengeance and avarice."

These were his words on November 12th. But, with his swift sense of Party possibilities, he had realised, by the time the Election campaign was in its stride, that 1918 the public expected something rather more dramatic in exchange for its votes. Nothing daunted, he set out on December 5th to give it to them.

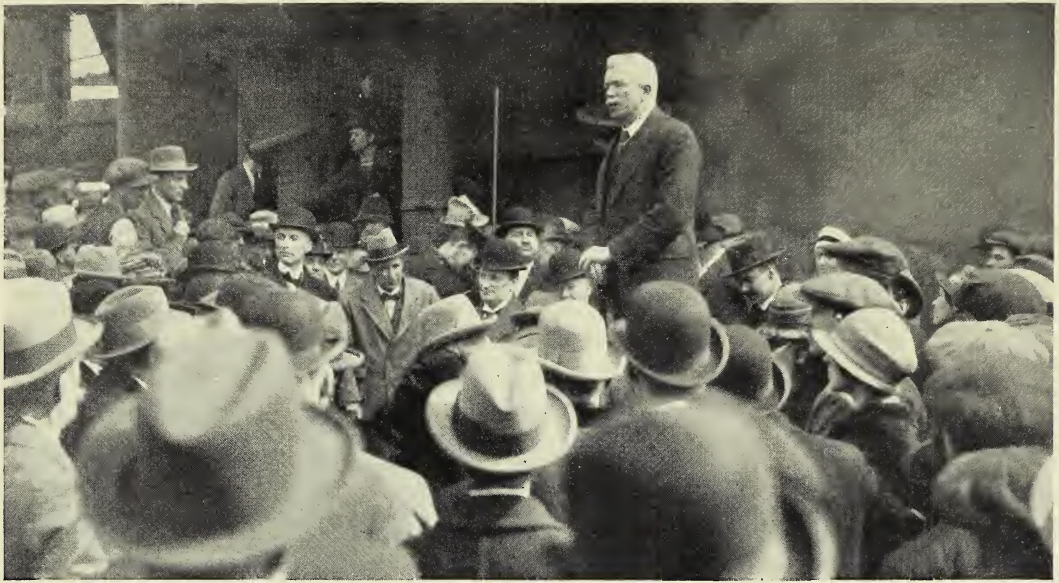
> "The Kaiser must be prosecuted! . . . Is there to be no punishment? Surely that is neither God's justice nor man's! The men responsible for this outrage must not be let off because their heads were crowned when they perpetrated the deed. . . . The Allies have agreed that the Central Powers must pay the cost of the war up to the limit of their capacity . . ."

A little later, when the Election campaign was drawing to an end and the votes were almost ready to be cast, Lloyd George named the figure of £24,000,000,000 as the probable amount of Germany's indemnity. It must have been obvious to him as to all of us that this wild figure was drawn from the realms of phantasy, and that no country could pay it, even with the best will in the world. Nor could we afford to take it in the form of coal ships and other goods. That would throw our men idle in thousands.

During the Election posters appeared everywhere, apparently based on the Prime Minister's eager threats against "the heads that were crowned when they perpetrated the deed," bearing the childish legend—"HANG THE KAISER!"

1918 This silly phrase was echoed from hundreds of Conservative platforms, together with fantastic promises that Germany and Austria should be milked till they were dry, and till our own country was bursting with fatness. Mr. Lloyd George, always clever at coining a phrase, revived—"A Land Fit for Heroes to Live In!" and threw it to the voting millions with a justified belief in their simple credulity.

From an electioneering viewpoint the Government tactics in this election were certainly clever. They put the Labour Party into the position of having to decry popular foolishness. We had always supported the principle that the Central Powers should be made to pay as much



MR. CLYNES
Addressing an Election meeting at a great ironworks.

as possible towards the cost of restoring the damage they had done ; but even a very provisional and optimistic estimate of the indemnities we could obtain had been named by Labour financial experts at £5,000,000,000.

Meanwhile, many qualified spokesmen were glibly promising ten times that sum. To the ordinary man in the street it is equally impossible to conceive one million or fifty thousand millions—they are just long lines of figures to anyone not trained in the mysteries of high finance. Not one voter in a thousand, even to-day, has any idea of the amount of our own nation's annual total expenditure, or how much we or any other country could conceivably pay in war indemnities.

In the 1918 General Election the crucial fact emerged that—apparently—Labour was trying to let 1918
wicked Germany down lightly, while certain Liberals and the Conservatives of the Coalition were anxious to help our own people by squeezing the last penny out of the beaten Huns, and were ready to hang the arch-villain, William, into the bargain.

In effect, the votes were bought. Labour only promised one-tenth of the price that Labour's enemies boldly offered. And Labour ridiculed the proposals to provide a depraving national sensation on a grand scale, by swinging a conquered Emperor on a silken rope in the middle of Whitehall ! Therefore Labour lost many thousands of votes.

Before the Election was held the Labour Party convened a special Conference to decide on its future policy. Several delegates demanded that the Party should withdraw entirely from Lloyd George's Coalition, because he himself had broken the terms of the political truce by forcing a General Election before Peace was signed.

I spoke against this suggestion. I argued that Labour was now the only moderating influence in Britain, and that it was our bounden duty to remain within the Government, no matter at what cost to ourselves politically, so that we might exercise a restraint on the more vengeful elements when the Peace terms came to be drafted. I believed that the whole future of Europe and the world depended on these terms being made fairly, with foresight and justice tempering their sternness; and I said that, unless British workers had official representation, ferocious terms would be made that would set the stage for another world war within the lifetime of some of those present that day.

Pray Heaven my prophecy may yet prove unfounded; but we have gone perilously far towards another European war since then.

Mr. G. B. Shaw opposed me, in an able and witty speech in which he said some cutting things about Mr. Lloyd George. In the end, a considerable majority adopted the resolution to break away from the Coalition immediately, and fight the election as opponents of our former colleagues.

This, of course, entailed my abandoning either my Labour loyalties or my post as Food Controller. I sent
1918 my resignation in due course to Mr. Lloyd George, and he accepted it, appointing Mr. George Roberts in my stead.

In the election I was returned unopposed for Manchester North-West. Three hundred and sixty-one Labour candidates went to the polls, fifty-seven of whom were returned. Several Labour leaders lost their seats, notably MacDonald, Snowden, Jowett and Arthur Henderson.

Just over ten million votes were cast, a quarter of which were in favour of Labour. Unfortunately, one and a half million working men in khaki, still on the various battle-fronts, were unable to vote at all. These men had fought the war, but were given no hand in shaping the peace.

Mr. William Adamson was chosen as Labour's new Parliamentary leader, and I was elected Vice-Chairman. It was unfortunate that Mr. Henderson, our former Leader, had not been returned, the more so since it is said that he lost his chance in the election mainly through the publication by his Tory opponents of a leaflet in which he was accused of " hob-nobbing with Lenin and Trotsky," the Russian revolutionaries, whom he had actually never seen.

Many famous political figures failed to gain re-election in 1918. Mr. Asquith, Sir John Simon, Mr. Runciman, Mr. McKenna and Mr. Herbert Samuel, all of whom had formerly held Cabinet posts, were defeated.

1918 As was inevitable under the circumstances, Lloyd George's Coalition went back with a huge majority, and the country held its breath to watch them perform the conjuring trick of getting fifty thousand million pounds out of a ruined Germany, and the fugitive Kaiser out of his new Palace of Doorn in stolid unimaginative Holland.

Chapter XX

1919—The tragedy of the Peace—Reparations fables—Changing the map of Europe—Quarrels at the Paris Conference—Collapse of President Wilson—Starving peaceful German women and children—Labour views on the peace terms—General Smuts protests—The three witches of Versailles—Labour manifestos—Disarmament hypocrisy—Breaking faith with the dead.

In January, 1919, the Peace Conference was opened in Paris, under the Presidency of M. Clemenceau of France. Despite its title, it gave rise, during its five months of life, to some of the bitterest squabbles of this century's political history, and the seeds sown during that conference may yet spring up, like the dragon's teeth, into crops of armed warriors bent on mutual destruction.

1919 Indeed, the " Peace " Conference resembled nothing so much as an assembly of armed men, squatting round the dying bodies of their victims, each greedily quarrelsome lest another should clutch more of the spoils than he.

The amount of indemnities Germany was first told she must pay was talked of wildly as £50,000,000,000. This was ignorance that would have shamed mere school-children. Some said that Germany alone should be made to pay for the *entire cost* of the War. That this was impossible hardly needs emphasising. After eight or nine conferences between Allied financial experts the amount of £11,000,000,000 was fixed.

It is interesting to reflect again that the highest figure named by British Labour experts was £5,000,000,000—a sum which subsequent events have shown was the most that force and cajoling could extract from Germany in post-War years.

The Peace Conference delegates realised that they could not extract such gigantic compensation from Germany in the form of money. So it was decided to take it in ships, coal and commodities.

It should have been obvious that to take reparations in such forms would adversely affect employment in Allied countries, while simultaneously crippling Germany so that she would be unable to obtain money for payments by peaceful commercial expansion. This elementary reasoning appears to have escaped the consideration of the experts.

The decision to place the reparations figure at £11,000,000,000 was arrived at in spite of the fact that its payment would make Germany an economic slave and send us more commodities than would be good for us.

1919

France demanded the entire output of the Saar coal-mines, for a period of fifteen years; the return of Alsace-Lorraine, worth three times as much in 1919 as it was when Germany seized it in 1870; and military occupation of the German Rhineland for a period of fifteen years.

To this Britain agreed, on condition that we received most of the German colonies.

Belgium and Italy, who had suffered very heavily in the war, by invasion and otherwise, received very little compensation territorially. They were not strong enough to demand it from their Allies!

The whole map of Central Europe was re-drawn, and several new nations—Czechoslovakia, Yugo-Slavia, Latvia, Lithuania and others—were created by so many strokes of the pen. Unfortunately, as their populations, with varying loyalties and sentiments, could not change quite so quickly, these arrangements have led to bickering and hatred ever since.

Germany was dismembered by the creation of a Polish corridor to the sea through the heart of Prussia. Russia was punished for its weakness in war by being ruthlessly pruned on all sides.

Germany was told that, in future, she must exist totally disarmed, in the midst of heavily armed neighbours. Her wonderful navy was to be handed over to the Allies, lock-stock-and-barrel. Her army was to be entirely disbanded. She was not to be allowed any vestige of a fighting air force. The nation that, for years before 1914, had been bred in pride at its weaponed might, was to be handcuffed, stripped, and flung into the gutter.

In the matter of mercantile shipping Germany was ordered to submit to commercial annihilation. She was to give up to the Allies *all her merchant ships above* 1600 *tons*, half the ships between 1000 tons and 1600 tons ; a quarter of her fishing fleet and a fifth of her river craft !

It must be remembered that, at this time, the country 1919 was literally starving for lack of imported food. How was she to import supplies, without ships ?

She was also to supply livestock, food, building materials, tools and machinery sufficient to reconstruct the areas devastated during the War ; and to supply 16,000,000 tons of coal annually for ten years to Italy and Belgium, apart from the coal that was being taken by France.

The allies of Germany suffered similar fantastic punishments. Austria was broken into small pieces, and Hungary was given away almost bodily. Bulgaria was stripped of her armaments and wildly pruned. Greece was given a free hand to do as she liked with defeated Turkey ; that it was Greece which suffered in the debacle that followed was not due to any lack of hatred on the part of Turkey's former conquerors.

Several of the leading statesmen at the Paris Peace Conference behaved like ill-tempered small boys. Mr Lloyd George and M. Clemenceau spent a large part of their time quarrelling, and once nearly wrecked the whole proceedings. The Italian delegates walked out, with enormous dignity, during a fit of pique. They stayed away several days, hoping to be asked to return ;

but, meanwhile, the remainder of the Allies were eagerly settling other Mediterranean claims by a generous distribution to each other of lands which Italy had been promised long before.

President Wilson, who might have dominated the inflamed European victors, and forced them into a wise and statesmanlike peace, provided one of the great tragedies of the Conference. His health suddenly broke up ; at home in the United States, unscrupulous political opponents used his absence to hurl him from power ; and, in Paris, he changed from a powerful leader to a querulous and helpless critic.

From the German point of view the Paris Peace Conference was not a conference at all. The German delegates were told what they were to accept. Some of them resigned, but no one cared. They had to sit and 1919 listen to the victors dismembering their country ; when they protested they were told briefly to be silent.

While all this was going on the war-time blockade instituted by the Allied fleets and armies, in order to starve Germany into surrender, was retained in full and merciless vigour. Thus was written one of the most shameful chapters in British history. It will never be forgotten.

German mercantile vessels were not allowed to go to sea. No food was permitted to enter Germany except in ridiculous quantities grudgingly sent by the Allies.

Meanwhile, German women and babies were dying from hunger, months after the German armies had retired from the field. This wicked state of things was caused mainly by Marshal Foch, who, after the War ended, seems to have been possessed of an insane spirit of revenge.

" Women and children in Germany are approaching starvation, and vast numbers of children are tubercular, as a consequence of this continued blockade," said Lord Robert Cecil, in the Commons, six months after the War had ended.

If Germany, to-day, hates us, it is more for continuing that blockade than for anything else we did to her after the War.

If the warriors and statesmen whose " mighty efforts won the war " (according to one of them since) had made equal efforts to win the peace, what a blessing would have fallen upon mankind !

It has long been admitted that we lost the peace. The defeated foes were bullied and crushed by the worst terms which the cupidity of the conquerors could impose. Despite all the lessons of history, the victors acted on the arrogant assumption that their enemies, being down, could be held down for all time.

It is, of course, easy to be wise after the event ; but the sanity of Labour was proved long before the fight finished, and stands in indelible records to-day. Labour's wisdom was shown during the discussion of the Peace 1919 terms, and in the years that immediately followed. We had no more ability than others, but we had learned from the records of past wars, and we did not bring to the subject the narrow Nationalism which had so often ruined peace settlements following earlier wars.

There are on record a great number of my own and other Labour pronouncements from 1916 onward, some of which I have quoted in earlier chapters. These proclaim our views on peace terms, and on the wisdom of avoiding excessive penalties in any treaty of settlement.

In the matter of reparations British Labour always insisted that the enemy must make good the destruction caused by the War in Allied countries ; but we denounced as folly and presumption the reparations figures named by some of the leading Allied statesmen, as well as the cheap catchwords, such as " Hang the Kaiser ! " which were used by certain of them for their own temporary ends.

One of the first pronouncements made on behalf of Germany, after she received the text of the Draft Treaty at Versailles, stated :

> "As our next aim, we consider the reconstruction of the territories of Belgium and Northern France which have been occupied by us, and which have been destroyed by war. To do so, we have taken upon ourselves a solemn obligation, and we are resolved to execute it to the extent which will have been agreed upon between us.
>
> "In this task we cannot do without the co-operation of our former adversaries. We cannot accomplish the work without the technical and financial participation of the victorious peoples, and you cannot execute it without us. Impoverished Europe must desire that the reconstruction should be fulfilled with the greatest success, and with as little delay as possible."

This "financial participation" is the form of aid which Governments and Banks are usually willing to provide. It affords a profit to those who offer it. But Germany's plea, denoting a reasonable and undistorted outlook on reparations, was received with scorn in Allied circles.

Consequently, in course of time, we were forced by 1919
loan and relief to raise a shattered Germany, which had then lost the power to pay; we had to help her then in order that, industrially and economically, we should help ourselves, and stave off European financial collapse.

Labour viewed the financial aspects of the Peace Treaty with mingled feelings of apprehension and despair. We felt apprehension because we knew that a poisonous crop of evil fruit would grow up from terms which could never be enforced, and despair because the few powerful statesmen who might have rendered a service to humanity wilfully refused to look ahead.

There was one exception—that of General Smuts. No one will suspect of Labour leanings so great a figure in the activities of Imperialist Britain. Yet he came nearer to our view than any other delegate at the Peace Conference. After signing the Treaty, he wrote:

> "I have signed this Treaty on behalf of South Africa, although the territorial settlements will need revision,

> and the indemnities stipulated cannot be exacted without grave injury to the industrial revival of Europe.
>
> "I say this now, not in criticism, but in faith; not because I wish to find fault with the work done, but because I feel that the Treaty has not yet achieved the real peace to which our peoples were looking, and because I feel that the work of making peace will only begin after this Treaty has been signed, and a definite halt called thereby to the destructive passions that have been desolating Europe for nearly five years. This Treaty is merely the liquidation of the war situation in the world."

He went on to plead for a victory of great human ideals, for a new International order, and for a spirit of generosity towards the defeated. He knew that such a spirit alone could repair and allay distress and suspicion, and avoid a recurrence of conflict in the future.

1919 On the material and economic side of the settlement, he knew, as we did, that if Germany were compelled (as she was) to send from her pits huge quantities of coal to Allied countries, British miners, who formerly supplied those markets, would be out of a job, and that if we took vast numbers of German ships (as we did), our shipbuilders would soon be idle.

Within two years the British coal and shipping industries were in a perilous state of stagnation and misery.

In financial matters, though the result took longer to arrive in its fullness, the result of our terms of victory was currency madness, in which the losers of the War were forced to undersell the victors, in order to save themselves from complete ruin, and thus brought European and American commerce and finance to misery, depression and the verge of complete international collapse.

Various members of the British Labour Party, myself among them, pointed out, in 1919, that the vengeance that the generals succeeded in enforcing in the Peace Treaty would recoil on ourselves, and would give

Germany just the arguments she needed to pose before the world as an ill-used martyr. The Peace Treaty terms were a direct incentive to the proud German people to commence some mighty effort to escape the tyranny which her late enemies showed themselves determined to inflict on her.

Events have proven every phase of our forecast. Hitler has risen to power because Foch, Clemenceau and Lloyd George, like the three witches in *Macbeth*, called up with thunder his apparition from the seething brew of their Paris cauldron. The other apparitions—the armed Head and the bloody Child—may yet arise to trouble Europe.

Had Germany won the War, the penalties she would have imposed on us would have been no better than those she has had to face. The recorded assurances given to the German people by their leaders show the 1919 vindictiveness of their intentions.

If our country had been forced to suffer the exactions, the degradations and the military occupations that Germany would have inflicted on us, or those that we in our folly inflicted on Germany, then the youth of England would have behaved exactly as the youth of Germany has done since 1919. Wars work like that, and the pity of it is that when simple men have fought and died for victory, the so-called statesmen who egged them on fail to make good use of what their sacrifice has won.

The British Labour Party, and the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C., did, on several occasions between 1916 and 1920, insist not only on general principles of settlement with Germany, but on specific details as well. The Annual Conference of the Labour Party at Southport in 1919 voted the following resolution :

> " This Conference is of the opinion, now that Germany has decided to sign the Treaty of Peace, that its speedy admission to the League of Nations, and the immediate revision by the League of the harsh provisions of the Treaty, which are inconsistent with the statements made

> on behalf of the various Allied Governments when Armistice was made, are essential both on grounds of honour and expediency. It therefore calls on the Labour Movement, in conjunction with the International, to undertake a vigorous campaign for the winning of popular support to this policy, as a first step towards the reconciliation of the peoples and the inauguration of a new era of international co-operation and goodwill."

I was present at that Conference, and also at a joint meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive of the Labour Party, on June 4th, 1919, in the House of Commons, when the following manifesto was voted unanimously :

> " The Parliamentary Labour Party and the National Executive, having considered the preliminary peace proposals, declare that the Treaty is defective, not so much because of this or that detail of wrong done, but fundamentally, in that it accepts, and indeed is based upon, the very political principles which were the cause of the war. The Treaty involves a violation of the principles embodied in Labour and Socialist Conference decisions. It also violates the understanding upon which the Armistice was signed by Germany, and is, therefore, a repudiation of the spirit and letter of the declarations of President Wilson, Mr. Lloyd George, and other Allied statesmen."

1919

Another manifesto was issued by the National Executive of the Labour Party, of which the following is the opening paragraph :

> " Throughout the war British Labour and National Inter-Allied Labour-Socialist Conferences formulated their war aims, and constantly opposed any settlement of the European struggle calculated to prepare fresh conflicts, create new grievances, and subject the European peoples to the future plagues of armaments and fresh wars. . . . The National Executive of the Labour Party considers that the published summary of the Peace Treaty is very defective from the standpoint of lasting peace, and bears evidence of compromised influence by capitalist imperialism, which still dominates the European states."

We wanted the peace to remove the causes of war. The greatest of these causes has always been the failure of nations to agree upon and maintain a common law of international life. The absence of such law sets up the desire, on the part of all great states, for preponderant military power with which to protect national gains, and territory with raw materials and outlets to the sea, with which to increase those gains.

Under such conditions, the security and prosperity of one nation has always meant the insecurity and poverty of another. The latter has then usually resorted to war, in an endeavour to grasp by force what circumstance denied in peace ; or the richer nation has attacked a dangerous commercial rival so as to put an end to all fear of successful competition.

This was why British Labour wanted the Paris Peace Treaty to include arrangements whereby the political security and economic rights of all the nations 1919 of Europe should rest upon the combined strength of a Society of Nations, pledged to arrangements which should ensure fair treatment for all alike.

The vengeful settlement imposed by the Allies was opposed by us, first, because it involved the punishment of millions of children and women, and of many workers who could have had no sort of responsibility for the War or its crimes ; secondly, because it made the Allies, who were the victims of war wrong, also the judges, executioners and beneficiaries of the punishment ; and, thirdly, because such punishment was likely to make worse the general causes which had been productive of wars in the past.

The Germans protested bitterly against the Peace Terms, and pointed out with prophetic accuracy some of the misfortunes which the enforcement of such terms would bring upon the world. A Note was published by the Allies, as a reply to the German objections, and this Note contained the outline of a doctrine which, had we meant it for ourselves as well as our enemies, would have brought a blessing to the world. It read :

> " Germany ignores the immense relief that will be caused to her people in the struggle for recovery, by the enforced reduction of her military armaments in future. Hundreds of thousands of her inhabitants who have hitherto been engaged in training for armies or in producing instruments of destruction will henceforward be available for peaceful avocations and for increasing the industrial productiveness of the nation. No result should be more satisfactory to German people."

This Note, dictated principally by generals stinking of the bloodshed of battle and arrogantly enforcing by armed threats an unpalatable command on a wounded people, was a cynical hypocrisy that will never be forgotten.

When we can apply the same doctrine to ourselves that we cheerfully offered to Germany, the result for us will be as good as we said it would be for others.

In wording their answer the Germans said, in so many words, that they were accepting the Allied terms
1919 on condition that the utter disarmament of Germany should be the first step towards world disarmament. For some years after Peace was signed Germany remained disarmed ; but the victorious Allies built up mightier forces of destruction each year. In the end Germany rearmed. Now she is a mightier military menace than she was before the last war.

Who is to blame ?

The tragedy of the peace was perhaps even greater than the tragedy of the War. Millions of dead and wounded men, millions of ruined lives and broken hearts, were sacrificed on both sides, during the War, mainly in a blind idea, held equally on both sides after the first few months, that this was " a war to end wars." Yet, when the time came to write down the terms of peace, the men who had fought leaned wearily on their blunted weapons, while the men who had won fame and fortune in war-time diplomacy made sure, by their blundering or worse, that the foundations of future wars were well and truly laid.

Colonel John McCræ, later killed in action, wrote the memorable lines :

> " If ye break faith with us who die,
> We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
> In Flanders fields."

I wonder what those shadowy hosts thought in 1919, 1919
when the Peace Terms were published ? I wonder what they think of our rearmament programmes to-day ?

For the world has broken faith with them ; and now, God help the world !

Chapter XXI

1919—What the Peace Conference cost us—Food Ministry measures retained—The men who saved me from a lamp-post—Food Ministry accounts—A profit on national trading—Food control in future wars—Lloyd George on private armament firms—War profits—British troops mutiny—Formation of the League of Nations—I am made Doctor of Civil Laws at Oxford—The Victory March—The railway strike of 1919—Parliament greets the first woman M.P.—The coming of the Depression.

Before leaving the story of the Paris Peace Conference it may be of interest to mention a few details concerning it which came within the scope of my old department at the Food Ministry.

As far as Britain was concerned, the Conference was a costly affair. The net payments from the Ministry of Food on behalf of Government officials at the Conference were approximately £95,000. A further £25,000 was paid for dilapidations to the premises, furniture and 1919 fittings of the Hôtel Majestic, in Paris, where the British plenipotentiaries were lodged. This latter figure seems to suggest that a certain amount of damage was done during the celebrations consequent upon the victory!

It appeared at the time that many of the details of the Conference were mismanaged. Certainly great numbers of officials and staff went to Paris only to find that no work existed there for them, and stayed holiday-making at Britain's expense.

In other ways, too, there were certain imperfections. Some of the British delegates were sent over in a destroyer to Boulogne, and arrived at 8.50 one morning, after a swift voyage through mountainous seas. They begged to be allowed to go ashore at once and feel solid ground beneath their feet, but the Commander of the destroyer, who was not pleased at using his ship for a ferry-boat, told them grimly that his orders were to land them at 9.40, and that no seaman ever disobeyed orders !

The sea was running very high, and a destroyer is by no means a pleasure-boat. When the delegates were put ashore, on the stroke of 9.40, some of them were very unwell ; and between their sorrows and customs delays they missed the 10 a.m. fast train to Paris, and were not in their places when they were required !

After the War the Food Ministry declined in importance. When I left my post as Food Controller, I left behind a typed statement of my views concerning a continuance of certain functions of the Ministry.

I realised that some control would be necessary for a considerable time, that food shortages would not speedily 1919 disappear, and that unemployment with consequent reduction in food-purchasing power would probably soon rise to a very high figure. These conclusions were not inaccurate.

In any case I felt that the removal of price restrictions would give opportunities to the profiteer, and that even when supplies had become normal, the experience we had gained in price-fixing ought not altogether to be discarded.

Time showed that this was a sound belief, but time also showed a great deal of Parliamentary impatience to get rid of almost all wartime practice. When, however, such practice had been discontinued, grievances and protests became so common that a Commission of a kind had to be instituted, and its remnants in some form still exist, under the protection of a department of the Board of Trade.

I obtained Mr. Lloyd George's promise that any measures found to be generally good, as a result of their application by the Food Ministry, should be embodied in permanent legislation. It is a pity that more of the suggestions definitely made when the Food Ministry proper was about to be disbanded were not rigidly applied, and continued, at least with respect both to prices and profits, in the case of several of the more important food commodities.

I cannot leave the subject of the Food Ministry without a brief reference to a few of the men who gave to me such excellent assistance. First there were my two Private Secretaries.

Mr. H. S. Syrett did work of a general character, but also rendered special service as a Secretary to the Consumers' Council. His advice and assistance greatly increased the worth of that Council, and to myself he was unfailing in his helpfulness, tact and drive.

His partner was Mr. Sydney Walton, later to become famous as the organiser of the Victory Loan. He was my first and principal Private Secretary, and I remain indebted to him for sacrifices and qualities which even
1919 in State departments are not common.

A Labour Minister more than any other political chief is supposed to be specially approachable. He is deemed always to be available for conversations or deputations which numerous colleagues in the country may think proper to suggest.

While willing to remain available for all reasonable approaches, Ministers in war-time, whether Labour or not, have little time to spare. Therein came the peculiar genius of Mr. Walton. In addition to other attributes for fine service, he was the very abstract of disarming courtesy. Rare Sydney Walton!

He could deal with a queue of callers like one who when he had turned them away empty but happy would leave them convinced that it would be a great pleasure to see them again whenever they should be passing that way.

My Parliamentary Private Secretary was the Hon. Waldorf Astor, now Lord Astor. He was not of the Labour Party, but I asked him to act with me because long before the War he gave evidence of deep and sincere interest in social affairs. His work for me was of the highest quality, and as he never considered himself first, and gave freely of his time and means, he did the work all the better for enjoying it so much.

In a departmental sense these men were my subordinates. In practice they were my colleagues and I continue to count them amongst my most valued friends.

Among the men who held high positions as permanent officials I would place first Sir William Beveridge and the late Mr. F. E. Wise.

Sir William has won renown in several spheres of activity. He was long the chief of the London School of Economics, and later master of University College, Oxford. He always had his head full of rich material for schemes and plans to meet the emergencies of war-time food shortages and panics. As every day brought a crop of new problems to us at the Food Ministry, Sir William was undoubtedly in his right position, and played an unseen part whose importance cannot easily be 1919 overestimated.

Mr. Wise was only second to him in resource, and equal to him in industry and determination to work regardless of hours of physical strain. Frank H. Coller was a cheerful, sagacious and hard-working secretary.

I could fill many pages with merely the names of men who came to our assistance with an abundance of experience in business, finance, industry, agriculture, buying and selling and transport. I have had some harsh things to say about business men who used the War as a time in which to profiteer ; but it is only just to add that there were thousands who seemed entirely selfless, and who worked without hope of recognition or reward tirelessly and faithfully to give their specialised knowledge in the service of a sorely-driven country.

As I cannot name them all I will mention none, knowing that they are content in the knowledge of what they did for Britain. But their patriotism and eagerness to help their motherland in its years of greatest peril remain with me a treasured memory, as one of the finest things that I saw in the War.

When I retired from the Food Ministry after it was all over, my colleagues there gave a celebration dinner on my behalf. The Chairman at the dinner was Mr. Astor, and he had a number of complimentary things to say regarding my work. Everything was most pleasantly arranged, and I enjoyed myself very much, while the meal was perhaps the most lavish I had enjoyed since 1914.

In acknowledging, at this dinner, the splendid and loyal assistance I had received from my staffs, I said :

> " The Food Ministry was established to meet a very stern necessity, and it is not too much to say that its work was begun with some fear of grave consequences following. Now, we find that though much of its work may be brought to an end, a great deal of it is regarded with feelings amounting to popular approval.
>
> 1919 " I heard of someone saying of the three Food Controllers, of whom I have been one, that the first Food Controller was obliged to resign, the second Food Controller was worked to death, and the third would be hanged on a lamp-post.
>
> " You, gentlemen, as the Staff of the Ministry, as the men who have devised the schemes and applied them, as the men who have met the difficulties and overcome them—you have saved me from that fate."

There was a good deal of laughter.

It was no less than the truth, however, to say that the loyal co-operation of all members of my old staff, together with the great courage of our seamen and the steady good humour of the public at large, had averted more risks of dangerous rioting over food shortages.

The Food Ministry, from nervous and uncertain beginnings, grew, during the War years, into an enormous and useful department. When Lord Rhondda took over in succession to Lord Devonport, the staff numbered about four hundred. When I resigned this had increased to over six thousand, apart from the thousands of Food Committees, Councils, and other local authorities who acted for us throughout the country.

During its existence the Ministry handled over £1,400,000,000. Its annual turnover while I was Food Controller was about £900,000,000. During the time I was in control its profits amounted to just over £13,000,000 gross, £11,500,000 of which was set aside towards liquidating expenses during 1919, in view of the tremendous upset in food conditions that would be caused by army and navy demobilisation, by the huge demand for ships to carry home returning soldiers to all parts of the Empire, and by the disposal at a loss of vast quantities of food reserves which we had accumulated for use during another prospective winter of war.

After this generous margin had been deducted the profit balance was still nearly £2,000,000; and, as it was found that the £11,500,000 was not all required for the purposes outlined, a good proportion of that was devoted to the charitable work of sending foodstuffs 1919
to starving enemy nations.

Between the Armistice and the Peace, the combined Allied Food Ministries distributed 2,500,000 tons of foodstuffs in Europe, at a cost of £5,000,000. Much of this cost was borne by the United States. 250,000 tons gross of British shipping was used to carry this food to Germany and Austria, and in the same period we sent 4,500,000 tons of food to France and Italy, to relieve want there.

When the powers and duties of the Food Ministry were eventually transferred to the Board of Trade, great quantities of foods, accumulated for future war use in Britain, were sold. It was impossible to place such quantities on the market without loss; for example, 700,000 tons of sugar, which had cost us £106 a ton, were sold at £70 a ton.

When the last entry had been made in the last Food Ministry ledger, it was found that, after deducting all expenses (which amounted to less than 1 per cent of our turnover), after paying interest at the Banks on funds we had borrowed, after allowing for all subsidies, and all losses of perishables and losses on forced sales of stocks at the end, we had made a clear net profit of one-half per cent.

The Food Ministry had thus performed the onerous task of rationing Great Britain in war-time, when every condition was against us, when ships were being sunk by hundreds and demanded for army service by thousands, when profiteers abroad and discontent at home played havoc with our intentions, not only without a penny's cost to the country, but at a profit.

That profit amounted to £7,000,000.

Yet the Food Ministry was dissolved. To my mind, the incontrovertible figures which bear witness to the results of our work are a final and conclusive argument in favour, not only of State trading, but of the nationalisation of all our principal industries.

Never was it more clearly shown than in the work of the Food Ministry that the State is a better shop-
1919 keeper, a better employer and a better salesman than the private owner and the capitalist. Never was it more perfectly demonstrated that the public could be ably served, in production and distribution, by the State.

Yet the lesson has still to be applied, like so many others that the War taught us.

If we are ever involved in another war, it is quite certain that national rationing will be enforced early in the outbreak. This will be all the more vital then, because our Navy, which protected our food-ships from attack during the 1914–18 struggle, may be nearly useless when—as will happen next time—those food-ships are attacked intensively from the air.

This aerial attack on our trade routes will bring such extreme privation to Britain, largely dependent as she is upon food received from outside these shores, that probably Martial Law will be proclaimed in these islands from the first day of any future struggle. Starvation for large districts seems unavoidable, since enemy aircraft will certainly attack our ports intensively, and thus cut the very arteries of our food distribution service, as well as sweeping the seas to destroy food vessels on the ocean routes.

If the Government is unable to keep us out of future wars then it should at least supply granaries for the storage of vast quantities of emergency rations in Britain, and keep those granaries full ; and a shadow Food Ministry should be created, ready to carry on in emergency. Otherwise, we shall be starved into submission within a month or two of any future outbreak of war.

When I resigned my post as Food Controller I became free to devote my energies to my work in and out of Parliament, on behalf of the Labour Party.

One of the measures which we advocated most persistently in the immediate post-War years was a fair distribution of war profits. I wrote in a leading newspaper in 1919 :

> " The total reserve of private wealth among the richer classes in Great Britain during the war years has been increased by something over £3,000,000,000. This enormous private gain has accrued at a time when the debt of the State has increased by £6,000,000,000." 1919

During this time, the Excess Profits Tax yielded to the State about £1,000,000,000, leaving the colossal sum of £2,000,000,000 in the pockets of the war-time profiteers—their direct gain from the bloodshed and sorrow which they had not personally shared.

British Labour asked that this £2,000,000,000 should be collected and used to liquidate some of the War debt of the nation. Calculations were also prepared by Labour financial experts—the same who had proved themselves so accurate in estimating the figure which Germany could pay in reparations—demonstrating how a Capital Levy could be instituted, to general national good, so as to wipe off the War Debt completely, and thus release Britain from one hundred years of financial serfdom.

This Capital Levy could have been inaugurated without causing pain or poverty anywhere in Great Britain, and all classes would have benefited incalculably by the complete liquidation of the War Debt, and the burden that would thus have been lifted from our national trade.

I shall go more fully elsewhere into the question of the desirability of a Capital Levy. Meanwhile it is enough to say that our efforts in 1919 and 1920 in this direction were defeated mainly by the men who had done well out of the War, and had no intention of abating their greed in peace-time.

In January, 1919, several questions were asked in the Commons as to the difficulties of sending back British Colonial troops to their homes overseas. Not enough was done, however, and there were angry riots of troops at Dover, Folkestone, and elsewhere, while mobs of khaki-clad men made scenes outside the War Office in London.

Canadian troops mutinied, and five were killed and
1919 over a score wounded in one camp before discipline could be restored. There were ugly scenes in London, but fortunately the situation was eased without public danger.

Demobilisation of the citizen armies who had won the War soon proved to be a menace to industrial peace. The men had been promised, when they joined up, that they would find their jobs still waiting for them when they came back. A million never came back; but even those who did were soon to realise that promises, made in the fervour of conflict, were worth nothing in the chill days that followed the peace.

By March, 1919, "The Land Fit for Heroes to Live In" had over 1,000,000 men unemployed and asking for work. Hundreds of them had to sit shivering on the curbs of our big cities, pulling their "British warms" round them, and waiting, cap in hand, on the charity of the people for whom they had suffered wounds and gassing, and risked death.

With these witnesses to the futility and stupidity of war silently accusing us every day as we made our way to the House of Commons, debates were held on the part Britain was to play in the formation of the League of Nations.

The League, as originally planned, was a majestic and noble idea. But this faction and that was pandered to in its eventual formation. Russia was left out because she had turned republican. Germany was excluded because of her moral guilt in the past war, despite the fact that this action might well stir up resentment that should one day fan another.

America, never very enthusiastic of the ideal President Wilson was chiefly responsible for creating, decided eventually not to participate.

The League Covenant, instead of binding its members to abjure war altogether, temporised weakly by mildly asking them to submit their quarrels to the League before deciding them in their own way. Italy pretended to consult the League later, with regard to Abyssinia—and then settled the affair by force in the old lamentable way. 1919

British Labour advocated a stronger League, and has always done so. It is our opinion that only by creating a Central International Court at Geneva, possibly backed by a powerful international armed force, as the civil court is backed by the police force, can eventual peace come to the democracies of the world.

During the early part of 1919 Durham University decided to confer on me its degree of Doctor of Civil Law, as a recognition of my work at the Food Ministry. I had avoided other honours, but I prize this one.

The ceremony was solemn and impressive, and in addition to its educational features it had, within Durham's great cathedral, a devotional side which will live long in my memory.

A little later in the year I was invited to go to Oxford University to receive the title of an Oxford Doctor of Civil Law. In the midst of an alarming company of illustrious personages I went through the ancient ceremony called the Encænia, which, as it was conducted in

Latin, and consisted largely of eulogistic speeches, provided a very humane means of conferring a valued academic distinction, without raising too many blushes on the cheeks of the recipient.

Among other celebrities present at the ceremony were Marshal Joffre, Lord Beatty, Field-Marshal Earl Haig, and the United States Food Controller, Mr. Hoover, with whom I had collaborated in dealing with international food problems.

The Latin was out of my reach, but I remember thinking with astonishment, as the sounding phrases rang in my ears, of the way in which my stolen studies beside the whirling machinery of an Oldham mill had brought me now, to stand, in a scarlet gown, in the oldest home of British learning.

In the same month the Allied Victory March was staged in London. Special detachments of troops, led 1919 by General Pershing of the United States, Lord Beatty, Lord Haig and Marshal Foch, rode through the streets, and saluted King George as he stood outside Buckingham Palace.

I wrote at the time in *The Observer* :

> " Although workmen, like others, share in the peace celebrations, many of their representatives have shown signs of wishing officially to take no part in them. For peace has come in such questionable shape that it still travels hand in hand with war."

And, indeed, though the bands played and the regiments glittered and tramped through London, the beating hammers of our shipyards were pausing, the motors of the industrial country were ceasing to hum, and the cranes over the Welsh coalfields were swinging slower and yet more slow.

Yet Parliament would not listen when Labour Members, myself among them, suggested, time and again, that the coming industrial depression, which we could see ahead, could be greatly diminished by nationalising certain industries, and by a more equitable distribution of the profits the workers of the country were earning.

It was not that the leading statesmen of the post-War years were unaware of the evils of private profiteering. In the House of Commons on August 18th, 1919, Mr. Lloyd George stated that by setting up national munition factories, shells which the taxpayer was buying then at 22s. 6d. could be produced for 12s., and that Lewis guns which were costing the nation £165 could be produced for £35. The prices of these commodities of death have risen sharply since.

The Prime Minister continued :

> " Through the costing system and the checking of the national factories we set up during the war, there was a saving of £440,000,000 of the taxpayer's money."

In the Government's recent rearmament campaign hundreds of millions of pounds will be filched from taxes to swell still higher the incredible profits which the armament manufacturers, and all the connected steel and other industries concerned, will take from the nation. 1919

The swing-back to private profiteering after the War, combined with the return of millions of disappointed and unsettled men from the battlefields, soon brought about the first of the great industrial troubles that were to scourge the decade following the signing of peace.

In 1919 food costs in Britain were 115 per cent above pre-War level. Wages had risen during the War, but as soon as the struggle was over employers tried to force down their payments to their employees, careless of the fact that necessary foods were still terribly expensive.

In September nearly half a million railwaymen came out on strike, as a protest against threats to reduce their wages. They were led by J. H. Thomas and C. T. Cramp. The latter had been following his daily occupation as a guard until within a few months of the outbreak of the strike. I knew him well, and when I was at the Food

Ministry I had persuaded him to serve on the Consumers' Council.

For eleven anxious days these two leaders went among the men, trying to reach a settlement that would give them justice while at the same time recognising the difficulties which the War had thrown on the railway companies, who had borne the enormous burden of transporting British troops for four years.

In the end the men gained a signal victory, and wages were guaranteed them at double pre-War rates, with which they could purchase food that would cost them double its pre-War price. Their hours of work were also improved.

During the strike troops in "tin hats" and with fixed bayonets guarded the main railway lines, food convoys of Army lorries were escorted by tanks and armoured cars, and every endeavour was made in certain quarters to give the struggle the character of revolution. 1919 None the less, the railwaymen gained their end, and without any of the violence which had been so freely suggested by their political opponents.

During the summer and autumn a cotton strike took place in Lancashire, miners struck in Wales and Yorkshire, and 900 London policemen were dismissed for using strike methods to try to get Government recognition for their Union.

Already Britain was sinking into a commercial slough of despond, as a result of the backwash from war conditions and wild war finance.

December 1st, 1919, was a memorable date in House of Commons history. On that day the first woman M.P. took her seat in the House.

Women over thirty had been given the right to vote just before the end of the War, largely in tribute to the gallant way in which the Suffragettes had ceased from embarrassing the Government during the War years, and had turned their energies loyally towards helping the country in its hour of need.

The Labour Party had always advocated the extension of franchise to women, and was dissatisfied with this partial measure of 1918, but we had not then the power to increase its scope.

In the 1918 General Election sixteen women stood as candidates, but only one, the Countess Markievicz, was returned for an Irish Division. She, however, was a staunch Irish Republican, and had led in person a section of the armed rising in Ireland in 1916. She therefore refused to take her seat at Westminster after having won it.

At the end of November my former Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Food was raised to the peerage, and his wife, the American-born Lady Nancy Astor, decided to contest the Plymouth seat her husband thus left vacant.

She was successful, and was introduced to the House by Mr. Balfour and the Prime Minister. A good deal of comment ran among the benches as to what sort of dress this first woman M.P. would wear in Commons ; and 1919 some relief was felt when Lady Astor appeared, in becoming feminine attire, and wearing a hat.

She has proved since one of the most interesting but often troublesome personalities in the House. Swift in question, doughty in debate, on her feet in an instant to repel argument or attack.

The Christmas of 1919 was kept with great rejoicing, as the first Yuletide of Peace after the War. But the note of the rejoicing was hollow ; outside the halls of feasting lounged vast, silent crowds of unemployed, their threadbare jackets buttoned to keep out the winter sleet, their hungry eyes enviously staring at the lighted windows behind which revelry held sway.

The restrictions imposed by the Food Ministry had been removed, with disastrous results. Profiteers had driven up the price of bread from 9d. a loaf to 1s. 4d. a loaf. Sugar cost 1s. a lb., butter 2s. 10d. a lb., and milk 6d. a pint. Eggs cost 9d. each.

Small working-class houses cost £1,000. The workers could not afford to buy them, or to pay the rents which such prices made necessary. Some few built insanitary shacks out of worn-out Army huts, and even soap-boxes and petrol-tins. These places were not weather-proof, and mortality, particularly among infants, rose with dreadful speed when increasing numbers of people went to live in them.

More and more soldiers were being demobilised, marrying, and needing homes ; but the wants of the men who had fought only provided the housing profiteers with opportunity to drive up prices still further.

Letter-post rates were raised to 2d. and telegrams to 1s. in a Government endeavour to find money with which to subsidise the private builders, instead of grasping the
1919 problem boldly and nationalising the building industry. Railway fares rose high above even war-time level.

All this time the rates of wages were falling.

Mr. Lloyd George's friends claimed for him that he had won the War ; and indeed he may be said to have done so, I think, more than any other man on the British side. But he could not win the peace. His " Land Fit for Heroes to Live In " was more detestable in 1920 than it had been in 1918, under war conditions.

The ragged men begging in the gutters, clad in the remnants of khaki overcoats, were learning that only a small proportion of the price of war is paid while actual hostilities are in progress.

Chapter XXII

The Irish Question—The Act of Union—Disraeli on Ireland—The execution of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien—Parnell—Striking against rent—My memory of Gladstone—The Phœnix Park murders—Work of the Irish Party in Commons—Memories of their leaders—Labour plans for Ireland—G. B. S. on Sinn Fein—Ireland and the war—The 1916 rising—Casement's revolver turns the tide—My views on Irish Conscription—Post-war problems—Ireland to-day.

Had there been no Irish question I should not have been born in a Lancashire town in the year 1869.

In his early manhood my father, with thousands of others, was driven from the West of Ireland by acts of repression which forced him into poverty and compelled him to seek a livelihood elsewhere. 1869

Generations before that time a genuine Irish Parliament was destroyed by methods which history has since admitted were disgraceful and corrupt, and an " Act of Union " (which caused further disunity) gave to Ireland and England a single parliament between them.

Insurrection, agitation, rebellion and crime fill in the period between the Act of Union and the time when England forced on Ireland—two parliaments instead of one! Apparently the idea was that this duplication might make up for the space during which Ireland had had no real parliament at all.

In 1829 Catholic Emancipation was carried out in Ireland, after a vast movement of the people's will, behind which lay the threat of physical force. Daniel O'Connell, the incarnation of this impulse, pressed for the Repeal of the " Union " as a next step. He fought gallantly for the restoration of self-government to Ireland, on a basis which would safeguard the rights of the Protestant minority.

His words, delivered to immense assemblies throughout the country, reached the heart of Ireland with the same fervour that Mussolini's carry to-day throughout Italy. He sowed the seed which will eventually restore much of my country's ancient glory.

In 1840 Dublin was the capital of a country whose population had reached 8,000,000, and was rapidly increasing. A terrible proportion of these people were miserably poor, and were discontented because they were producing wealth for others while being starved of food themselves.

Poor as they were they were lifted by a national aspiration ; and once such a spirit is inspired in a land, no force in the world can crush it.

1867 In 1844 Disraeli described the position in Ireland when he referred to the extreme distress of the population, to the Established Church there, which was not the Church of the people, to the territorial aristocracy, and to the absentee landlords. He said :

> "What is the remedy? It is revolution! But the Irish cannot have a revolution. And why? Because Ireland is connected with another and more powerful country. Then what is the consequence? The connection with England becomes the cause of the present state in Ireland. If the connection with England prevents a revolution, and a revolution is the only remedy, England logically is in the odious position of being the cause of all the misery in Ireland.
>
> "What, then, is the duty of the English Minister? To effect, by his policy, all those changes which a revolution would do by force. That is the Irish question."

Despite this statesmanlike exposition, little was done to help Ireland. In England a good deal of mistrust was aroused by Irish efforts at self-determination, and this feeling sometimes took an unfortunate form.

An event in 1867 aroused unparalleled feeling among

Irish people the world over; and, in later years, I was witness to the depth of this feeling among the growing Irish population of Lancashire.

Three Irishmen were hanged because one of them, in attempting to smash the lock of a prison van in which another Irishman was held captive, shot at the lock, and unintentionally killed a policeman who was concealed within behind the door of the van.

At the vindictive punishment of three men for a crime on the part of one of them, which none had realised for one moment would end in a killing, ordinary political prejudice was turned to a cold fury of anger.

The names of Allen, Larkin and O'Brien echoed like a war-cry in the hearts of millions of Gaels. The last words of the dead men were repeated and treasured.

At their trial each man solemnly swore that there was no intent to kill. On hearing the sentence they all cried out "God save Ireland!" The courage with which they met their fate inspired T. D. Sullivan to write the lines of the hymn "God Save Ireland" which, ever since, has been a sort of National Anthem, and has been sung at all the big Irish gatherings throughout the world. 1867

In a Commons speech some time after their death John Bright said:

> "I believe these three men were hanged because they had committed a political offence, and not because of the murder of one man by one shot. I believe it was a great mistake."

The men became known as the Manchester Martyrs, and their death united every class of Irishman the world over. Processions, demonstrations and mass meetings were held, and in Lancashire especially the anger aroused was at its highest.

One of the first utterances of Parnell in the House of Commons was a fierce interjection, during a speech in which the Chief Secretary for Ireland was denouncing the men whom he described as "The Manchester Murderers."

"No, no!" shouted Parnell; and, on being further challenged, he declared:

> "The Right Honourable Gentleman looked so directly at me when he said that he regretted that any Member of the House should apologise for murder, that I wish to say as publicly as I can that I do not believe, and never shall believe, that murder was committed at Manchester. . . ."

To this day "Allen, Larkin and O'Brien Sunday" is celebrated every year in Manchester, and thousands of Irishmen walk in procession to the church where the memorial service is held.

The anger aroused in Irish circles at the political treatment accorded by England bred a sullen spirit of retaliation. When I was a lad in Lancashire numbers of the big works and mills displayed notices saying briefly:

1867 NO IRISH NEED APPLY.

But the agitation for Home Rule did not seriously inconvenience the English Government, at least until the close of the 'seventies. Then, when a bad season brought renewed distress in Ireland, James Fintan Lalor mooted, in *The Nation*, a proposal which amounted to a general strike against rent, until all rents should be lowered.

The leading agitator in the movement that followed was Michael Davitt, son of an evicted tenant from Mayo, who had grown up in Lancashire among a mining community, where he had become familiar with the combination of the many against the masters. He had served ten years in gaol for his share in the Fenian raid for arms on Chester Castle, and had come back with a determination to break landlord rule in Ireland, and with a conviction that English working men would back Irish tenants. This able and fearless Irishman came over to help me later, in my first Election fight in Manchester.

When the Act of Union had been in force for some time Mr. Gladstone introduced his first Home Rule Bill in 1886.

I saw Mr. Gladstone only once. I was a youth at the time, still employed in an Oldham cotton mill, and I went to Manchester in the vain hope of hearing the great Liberal speak on Ireland.

When I got to Manchester I found that I had not the slightest hope of getting into the hall. However, I jammed into a crowd waiting to see him pass, and I have a vivid memory of climbing up a lamp-post to see the great man ride by in his carriage.

How little the lad at the top of the lamp-post dreamed that he, also, would be a Cabinet Minister one day!

When he introduced his first Home Rule Bill, Gladstone concluded his speech in the Commons with something more than a fervent appeal to Members. He pictured Ireland as at the Bar of the House, appealing for justice. He said : 1886

> "I beseech you to think well and wisely for the years that are to come."

Unfortunately the Parliament of that day did not do so. For many years the Home Rule campaign was continued, with the Liberal and Labour groups committed to its support, and the Tories in bitter opposition.

When, later, the Commons arrived at some sort of agreement, the Lords destroyed their work. But a stage was reached eventually whereby the vast majority of the Irish people showed that they were ready to accept in settlement a measure which would have given them less than half the power for self-government which, later on, the scared statesmen of England were forced to concede.

The prolonged and arduous fights of the Irish Parliamentary Party are now a matter of history. Its rise was a glory of sustained and brilliant service. Its fall was a calamity traceable to three outstanding events which Irish people could not control.

There was first the murder in Ireland of Cavendish and Burke, who were cut down with surgeons' knives in Phœnix Park by the armed agents of a secret society of Fenians. This outrage aroused towering indignation in the minds of the English electorate whose representatives had been thus brutally slain.

Lord Frederick Cavendish had just been appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland. It would appear that there was no intention to take his life, but he was in the way, and met the same fate as the companion with whom he was walking at the time. Mr. Burke was universally hated because of his work as Permanent Under-Secretary at Dublin Castle. None the less, his murder, and that of Cavendish, shook the constitutional movement, and put back the clock for many years.

There was, secondly, the crushing blow which the Parnell split inflicted upon the Party when he was named as co-respondent in the O'Shea divorce case. Mr. 1886 Gladstone's moral indignation at this, and his threat to withdraw Liberal support unless Parnell resigned the leadership of the Irish Party in the House, split that Party from top to bottom, and the ensuing internal conflict and weakness left a permanent mark.

The third factor was the unfortunate Rising of 1916 which I shall describe briefly later in this chapter. The effects of this Rising led to the complete annihilation of what had once been a great constitutional force.

The Irish Party in the Commons in pre-War days succeeded in winning the admiration and confidence of a large part of the English electorate. It was, in the main, a Catholic party, but its leaders frequently were Protestants, and its officials were chosen with complete disregard to religious attachments.

Before I went to Westminster I had watched the service of Irishmen there in relation to industrial laws, social legislation and working-class betterment. The Irish Party worked as the workman's friend.

I deplored the wild scenes in the House, which in those days became all too common ; but it was obvious that they were inspired by a feeling of deep resentment at being compelled to serve Ireland in the Parliament of another country. The Irish Members had not asked to be sent to Westminster, but to Dublin; therefore, it was hard to blame them too much for misbehaving in a foreign land.

Much as these men admired the ancientry and greatness of the Mother of Parliaments, their chief desire was to leave it, and to work for their own country in their own place and in their own way. I fear that such scenes will recur in any land when men are detained against their will.

Next to Parnell, the Irish Party enlisted and retained the services of many men of rare ability and attainment for Parliamentary work. Redmond, Dillon, Healy, O'Brien, Devlin, Sexton, Davitt, T. P. O'Connor and a dozen more formed a band which, for watchfulness and 1886 courage, were more than equal to any like number of men in Parliamentary history.

I often thought, as I watched them at work in the Commons, how much they were doing to cancel the prejudice against Irishmen which I had known in Lancashire in my youth, and which spread, to some extent, all over England in pre-War days.

I worked with the Labour Party to secure for Ireland as full a measure of self-government as any part of the United Kingdom enjoys, subject to the principle which we were always required to support—that there should be no separation of the two countries.

Ireland, of course, is not the property of England, and the Irish Members passionately declared that their country should be considered as being herself, and not the servant of another. But such consideration required reciprocal recognition of general British interests, which are inevitably interwoven with Irish interests; and this fact many of the headstrong young men of Ireland could not be made to admit.

I was always intensely interested in the baffling problems raised by the Irish demand for Home Rule, and not alone because I was of Irish blood. I pleaded for a settlement by proceeding upon three definite lines of effort:

> (1) Concession of freedom to the Irish people to govern themselves, not as a favour but because, however good English government might be for them, good government was not an acceptable substitute for self-government.
>
> (2) Recognition of the conflict between a large section of Ulster and the rest of Ireland, by providing the maximum of guarantees for the safety and freedom of any Protestant minority, in their fears concerning the actions of a Catholic majority.
>
> (3) Concession of one Parliament instead of the forcing of two upon people in different parts of the same country, who would never accept as a final settlement a provision of two Parliaments.

Short of an arrangement on these lines, I felt that a second-best settlement would be the establishment of one Parliament in Ireland, with the agreed exclusion from its jurisdiction of those counties in the north which are definitely Protestant, and which might wish to remain in association for even a long period with the Imperial Parliament at Westminster. 1906

Such a settlement would, I still believe, have made it much more likely that, eventually, the extremes of Unionist and Nationalist would merge in the common pursuit of mutual interest, and work earnestly as minority and majority in a one All-Ireland Parliament.

Primarily, the feeling in every Irishman's breast, be he Ulsterman or Nationalist and whether at home or in exile, is that he is a son of Ireland. Deep as the differences are between the various factions, there is a magnificent loyalty to country over all.

This spirit is shown clearly in the Sinn Fein movement, founded by Arthur Griffith in 1906. Many cruel things have been done by Sinn Fein (whose name means "We Ourselves"), and many cruel slanders have been uttered concerning the organisation. But let it be remembered that, at the back of all, there is the burning desire to do something for Ireland.

My friend and compatriot Bernard Shaw sent me, in 1917, a pamphlet he had just published, entitled *How to Settle the Irish Question*, in which he wrote :

> " Fed on dreams and Irish air, Sinn Fein are subject to an agonising desire to die for Ireland, which makes it quite impossible to keep them in order by the police methods customary in free countries. . . . They not only carry the flag of Freedom, but wear the colours of the Dark Rosaleen."

It is easy to laugh at such emotions, and not so easy perhaps to understand when they drive their possessors to outrage and rapine. But the emotions are there, and must be allowed for, since they form an ineradicable part of Irish nature.

After every General Election in Ireland the Irish Party brought to the English House of Commons overwhelming majorities in favour of self-government.

It suited some people to describe the Irish Party as Separatists who were aiming at a republic outside the Empire. That was not even good propaganda. It tended to create republicans, and it eventually weakened the 1912 Parliamentary movement to the benefit of Sinn Fein. The leader of the Irish Party, Mr. John Redmond, made the position plain in a speech to which I well remember listening, on April 11th, 1912 :

> " We on these benches stand precisely where Parnell stood. We want peace with this country, and we deny that we are Separatists. We say we are willing, as Parnell was willing, to accept a subordinate Parliament, created by Statute of the Imperial Legislature, as a final settlement of Ireland's claim."

During my pre-War years in the Commons I heard many similar declarations, and I knew, from contact with the Parliamentary leaders, and many of the rank and file, that these Parliamentary pledges were absolutely sincere, and that there was a deep-rooted desire to live on friendly terms with England.

None the less, as time passed and the Irish Question remained as unsettled as ever, the youth of Ireland became impossible to restrain. Conolly and Larkin organised a citizen army of 2,000 perfectly disciplined and fanatical men. Rifles were appearing in hundreds all over Ireland, and violence broke out sporadically everywhere. Ulster boasted of an armed volunteer forced 100,000 strong.

Only the outbreak of the World War in 1914 prevented something in the nature of Irish-English war, complicated by civil war within Ireland itself.

On August 4th, however, when the declaration of an Irish revolt would almost certainly have turned the scale in favour of Germany, and might well have resulted in the success of the Kaiser's vaunt that he would eat his Christmas dinner at Buckingham Palace, Ireland turned readily to the defence of the country that had persecuted her for so long.

1914 In the glorious records of the Irish Guards, the Inniskillings, and the other Irish regiments, the true story of Ireland's essential loyalty to England will be found, written in Irish blood.

John Redmond, leader of the Irish Party in the House of Commons, followed his promise at Westminster of Irish co-operation by raising a volunteer force of over 100,000 men to serve in France.

But the younger Irish element were still dissatisfied with the English Cabinet attitude. It was supposed by them that Ireland's gesture of loyalty would be followed by some sort of promise of Irish self-government ; but the English attitude was no more conciliatory after 1914 than it had been before. In the words of one famous Irish statesman, England seemed " willing condescendingly to overlook all the previous Irish efforts for freedom so long as Ireland remained docile in future."

A rising was planned for 1916, when it had become obvious that Ireland was no nearer her desires than she had been before the War.

Sir Roger Casement, Irish poet and soldier of fortune, who had published in pre-War years a plan for coordinating an Irish rising with a foreign attack on England, travelled from Germany by submarine to Ireland, to help in what he hoped would be an Irish war of freedom.

He had been promised German assistance in his project, but when the time came only a few rifles and machine-guns could be spared. Casement left Germany knowing that he was going to failure and death. When he went aboard the German submarine the commander commented with surprise on the small suitcase which comprised the distinguished passenger's sole luggage, and asked him whether he would not need anything else for the journey.

"Only my shroud!" was Casement's prophetic answer. 1916

Casement landed on the wild Irish west coast, but the German vessel carrying the arms with which his visionary army was to be equipped was sighted by a British patrol-ship, after having run our blockade and reached the Irish coast. As no revolutionary Irish were there to assist the German commander had to sink his ship to avoid capture.

Casement, skulking in a cave, was taken by the police. In Dublin plans miscarried ; some of the Irish volunteers refused to join the Rising ; and eventually Conolly and others struck their blow, well knowing it must fail, but hoping, by its means, to raise up a spirit in Ireland which no English opposition could ever quell.

About a thousand volunteers rose in Dublin on Easter Monday, 1916. They stormed various strategic points, and allowed themselves to be hemmed in there, hoping forlornly that Ireland might rise to support them. By a curious trick of chance a revolver taken from Sir Roger Casement helped to prevent his followers from seizing Dublin Castle, whose possession might possibly have turned opinion in the city in favour of the rebels.

On Easter Monday morning an officer in the courtyard of the Castle was showing this revolver to a friend when citizen volunteers shot down the sentry at the gates and came running towards them. The officer pointed the revolver at the running men and pulled the trigger several times. He admitted afterwards that he acted instinctively, and did not even know whether the weapon was loaded.

Some of the storming party fell, and the others were momentarily checked. The noise of the shots had brought soldiers to the spot, the gates were clanged shut in the faces of the besiegers—and the Castle, which commands the city and possessed some useful artillery, was saved.

Casement's own revolver had shot down Irish revolutionary hopes.

Of course, the might of English artillery smashed the rebellion in a few days. Fifteen of the leaders, most of them idealist dreamers, were shot, and about 3,000 other Irishmen were taken to England and interned. Skeffington and others, not implicated in the rebellion, were 1917 actually shot without trial by certain British officers.

Irish opinion in general had not supported the rising; but this martyrdom of a few innocent men dramatically changed the whole situation. Instantly England became once more the cruel oppressor that has always been the bogey of Irish minds.

Indifference changed to hostility; the armed bands of wild youths suddenly appeared in the light of splendid young heroes. Sinn Fein, which had been considered a dangerous prank, shone forth as a Crusade.

Mr. Asquith visited Dublin, and promised drastic changes in Irish government. Those promises were not kept.

Within about a year after this tragedy I and others of my colleagues serving with the Coalition Government had to decide an issue which had been raised for us by the intention of the Government to apply conscription to Ireland, so as to reinforce the armies in France broken by the disasters of 1917 and early 1918.

My view, which I stated strongly at the time, and which was shared by my Labour colleagues in the Government, was that there should be no Irish conscription without Irish self-government. I said that I would never be a party to forcing men to join an army in whose control they had no political say ; such action would have been worse than press gang compulsion.

Lloyd George and others carried through the Conscription Bill for Ireland despite our opposition. But they dared not enforce it. We warned them, and Irish authorities warned them, that to do so would cause an Irish war. The unfailing support I had received from the Irish in Manchester made me the more anxious on this matter.

So the conscription was made subject to an Order in Council which might be passed at any moment—but which the Government never dared to pass. The Irish Conscription Bill was a farce, and the Order in Council merely a cheap subterfuge to save the Government's face. 1918

Peace came in Europe, but not in Ireland. Eamon de Valera, who had broken an English gaol in 1918 after narrowly escaping hanging, became a national leader. Sinn Fein young men, wearing no uniform but branded by a terrible sincerity, began a serious policy of terrorism throughout Ireland.

The British Cabinet met threat with ponderous threat, and started to burn rebel's cottages in retaliation for acts of destruction by the insurgents. Sinn Fein, sober, relentless and determined, replied with the famous announcement—" For every cottage, a castle ! "

General French, made Viceroy because of his great reputation as a soldier, and backed by ever-increasing forces of English tanks and artillery, was ambushed while driving his car, and barely escaped with his life. Before long a condition bordering upon actual war developed between Ireland and England.

In 1920 the situation became so bad that I joined with other leaders of the Labour Party to send to Ireland a group of representatives, under General Thomson, to act as a Commission of Inquiry, and endeavour to find some basis for settling the dispute without further bloodshed. Thomson was a good Labour man, and the Commission revealed how utterly impossible it was to hope for any composure in Ireland until that country had been placed on the same footing of self-government as England enjoyed.

The Government would not take our advice, however. Warfare went on, and its ultimate end showed how even a great and powerful country can be held at bay by bands of citizen soldiers, patriotically inspired. Duty was their prompter, and martyrdom their reward. Against such a spirit the armed hosts of the mighty can never prevail.

By the summer of 1921 the Cabinet was forced to
1921 recognise that Ireland could never be conquered. Two Parliaments, one for Belfast and one for Dublin, were forced on the country, to the dissatisfaction of everybody concerned. Sinn Fein did not cease to struggle. Because of their activities Griffith, first President of a Nationalist Irish Parliament, speedily died of overwork, and Michael Collins, his natural successor, was assassinated.

After critical years the situation settled down to some extent with the accession of De Valera to power.

The position to-day finds the Irish question still unsettled. Steps have been gradually taken, without serious resistance by this country, towards the complete political separation that seems now to be inevitable. The problem of Irish unity is disturbing, and still creates great apprehension.

No one can accept as permanent a condition which divides the South from the North, and which detaches parts of the North from the North itself, on religious and political grounds.

There are those who say, even now, that unless the Irish problem can be settled permanently and justly very soon, Ireland, in view of her immense strategic importance in any aerial war in which Britain may later be engaged, might yet become the cockpit of Europe.

Chapter XXIII

1920–1922—Coal troubles in Britain—The Triple Alliance threat—Civil war feared—Army preparations—" Black Friday "—The Government prevented from interfering in the Russo-Polish war—British naval concentration and leave stopped—Labour keeps the peace—I become Leader of the Labour Party—Work of a Party Leader—The Unknown Soldier is chosen—Labour leaders die poor—Fall of the Coalition—" Clynes's Band "—Labour's great election gains—MacDonald succeeds me—Mussolini—France invades the Ruhr.

The industrial backwash of 1919 was followed, early in 1920, by grimmer conditions among the poor than had been known for many years.

In February, 1920, nearly every coal mine in Britain was selling its produce at a loss—the inevitable result of the Peace conditions that German coal should be sent as reparations to various of the Allies. On March 31st the Government gave up the control of the coal industry which it had exercised during the war years, despite various promises that the industry should be nationalised, which had been made when the goodwill of the miners was essential to military success. 1920

On the same day a meeting was held at Unity House by representatives of what was then known as the " Triple Alliance," to discuss what action should be taken towards the private mine owners, who signalised the end of Government control by a gigantic lock-out of employees who refused to accept an arbitrary cut in wages, for which there was no equivalent cut in living costs.

The Triple Alliance consisted of the miners, the railwaymen and the transport workers. Together they could have put into effect something closely approaching a general strike in Britain.

But their alliance was based on an unequal foundation. Miners and many transport workers could down tools without any grave effect being felt in the country for several weeks. If all the railways were paralysed, however, chaos would immediately result.

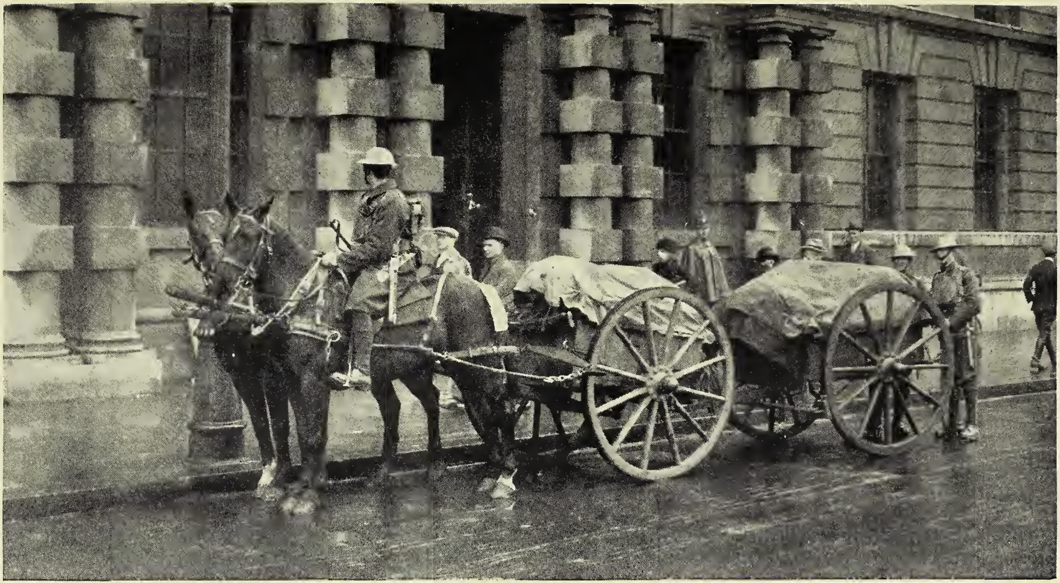
Nearly every trade and business in the country would feel a railway strike. The food supplies of Britain would instantly be restricted. In such an event, the people who would suffer most would be the poor people, not those against whom a Triple Alliance strike was directed.

After the leaders of the Triple Alliance had held a stormy meeting, it was decided that all its millions of members should be called out on strike on April 15th, unless the mine owners had granted the miners fairer terms before that time.

1920 It was obvious, however, to some of us in Parliament and elsewhere that such a strike as this would do incalculable harm, not alone to the cause of the three industries concerned, but to Labour as a whole, politically and economically. It would tighten the belt of every working man in the land, and make millions of poor women anxious about food for their children, without necessarily forcing the hands of the mine owners.

I have never been in favour of provoking strikes; I think that strikes, like wars, generally cause loss to both sides, and should never be indulged in without the gravest cause. Other Labour leaders were of my way of thinking, and we did all we could to make the men see that they were not serving their own interests by carrying out their intention of a paralysing strike.

As April 15th approached the Government made great capital out of what it called "Labour's menace to the State." An "Emergency Force" of several hundred thousand citizen-soldiers was mobilised from the middle classes, most of whom had only recently returned from war service. They were given rifles, bayonets and machine-guns; tanks and armoured cars appeared in



TROOPS IN WAR KIT IN WHITEHALL DURING THE 1920 COAL STRIKE

London and elsewhere ; and troops with " tin hats " and full war kit paraded the streets.

Hyde Park was closed, and used as a milk-distributing centre, while thousands of Army bell-tents sprang up there in a single night ; Regent's Park was filled with Army huts (which took five months to demolish when the crisis was over) ; and Kensington Gardens bristled with tents.

The country waited in dire apprehension for what looked like a Civil War.

Behind the scenes in the Triple Alliance, however, there was a good deal of discord. The railwaymen in particular were not anxious to support a strike in which their action provided about 70 per cent of the fighting power of the whole.

The Government was not aware of the discord at Unity House, and looked upon the affair with extreme disquiet. It has been disclosed since that a midnight conference, hastily summoned in Downing Street just before the Strike was due to commence, was attended by Bonar Law, collarless, and Lloyd George, wearing 1920 pyjamas and a dressing-gown, with his hair tousled just as he had risen from bed.

The subject of this talk was the threat of the miners to call out the " safety men," whose absence from their posts would have meant that the mines would have been ruined by flooding. This would have spelt disaster to owners and miners alike ; that it was seriously considered shows the bitter stage of feeling at which all had arrived.

Mr. Evan Williams, representing the owners, addressed a private meeting of leading Members of the House of Commons, at which I was present. Frank Hodges spoke with great effect on behalf of the men ; and it seemed that the basis of an agreement might be reached. In view of this the Prime Minister agreed to receive the miners' leaders next day, to discuss the new development.

But the miners' executive refused to go to Downing Street.

Hodges offered to resign. Everyone was deeply uneasy, and the situation looked blacker than ever. Moreover, public opinion, which had formerly been with the miners, now swung right round against them, because of their obstinate determination to strike.

The transport workers and railwaymen now felt that they were being involved in an unnecessary struggle.

The affair developed into a race against time, with the Government and the more moderate Labour advisers on the side of conciliation.

I was on my feet in the House of Commons, pleading the case of the miners, and outlining the gloomy prospects of a national cessation of work, when the news was brought to me that the railway and transport workers had withdrawn their decision to strike, and that the miners would probably agree to a temporary settlement on certain specified terms.

I was able to make the announcement to the House ; and the cheering which followed showed how deep had been the uneasiness of Members as to the outcome of the threatened struggle between three great Unions and the Government's armed citizen regiments. 1920

" Black Friday " was the name foolishly given by some to the day on which a catastrophic strike was averted. A number of us who had opposed the strike were denounced in scurrilous terms as " traitors."

This abuse grew to such a degree that the railwaymen's leader, Mr. J. H. Thomas, was obliged to bring a libel action against *The Communist*, which had been especially infamous in its attacks. £2,000 damages were awarded, the whole of which he donated to working men's charities. A portion was sent to relieve distress in Russia, despite the fact that it was the Communists themselves who had attacked him.

One of the statements made against Thomas was that he fled to America after " Black Friday," to escape public opinion till the affair was forgotten. This was a particularly silly story, because he had arranged nine months previously to pay this visit to the United States on T.U.C. business.

Mr. Thomas has himself told of a curious sequel to the affair of his libel action against *The Communist*. It was suggested at the time that it might be difficult to obtain payment of the heavy damages awarded him. But he received information from a certain source that a parcel of jewellery, once the property of the late Tsar, had reached England from Russia.

It was intimated to the defendants that Thomas would be prepared to take payment of his damages in this form, but it was impossible to obtain an admission that any particular jewels had been received.

After considerable investigation the fact emerged that a man met another one night on Hampstead Heath, and received a box of chocolates. Those chocolates contained priceless Russian gems, sent to England to swell Communist funds here.

With great difficulty more facts were obtained, and it was shown eventually that sufficient money and goods were held by the defendants to pay the whole costs that had been awarded by the Court against them.

Although this story sounds so astounding, Mr. Thomas has since produced a wealth of corroborative detail at every point. 1920

It was said in 1920 by certain critics that if the Union leaders had taken a ballot of workmen before "Black Friday" they would have discovered a vast majority in favour of a strike. This I cannot believe, though I went fully into the men's opinions at the time. In any case, it is obvious now that a strike would have been in the very worst interests of the men, eventually, though their indignation stirred a few of them to desire such definite action at the time.

The outcome of this affair was black indeed for the miners, who persisted in their strike attitude, against the advice of their leader to accept temporary terms. Their strike dragged on for four months, caused great misery among themselves, and did them no good.

During the first half of 1920 the Government was kept very busy with the Home Rule Bill, a Coal Bill and long discussions about pensions, unemployment and tithes.

But, as summer passed into autumn, these issues were overshadowed by something more terrible and portentous. The threat of civil war was over, but the peril of another world war loomed menacing over Russia.

Poland invaded Ukraine, and Russia replied with a paralysing invasion of Poland. Cossacks came clattering to the very gates of Warsaw, and it seemed that the new Polish State, set up by the Allies at Versailles, was about to collapse.

Under Marshal Pilsudski Poland turned the peril into victory. Meanwhile General Wrangel, whose Government in South Russia was recognised by France and furtively encouraged by England, struck the Soviet there; and Mr. Churchill, ever bellicose, demanded that Britain should deliver a combined land and sea attack on the Soviet Union.

Numbers of our troops were still in Russia. Secret preparations were made; British warships were ordered 1920 to concentrate in the Baltic, and men on leave were recalled. Floods of propaganda were prepared ready for circulation in Britain. The House of Commons was suddenly adjourned, and all Europe waited with bated breath for the flaming forth of war again—a war in which other countries would have joined on both sides.

On Wednesday, August 4th—the anniversary of the outbreak of that other World War only six years earlier—Arthur Henderson sent telegrams to all local Labour parties, urging that demonstrations should be made against the implication of Britain in a war against Russia.

On August 5th we called an emergency meeting of the Council of the T.U.C., the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Labour Party Executive. At this meeting a Council of Action was formed, which I was invited to join.

We decided to call on all workers to invite united Labour throughout the country to withdraw all workmen from any attempt to lead Britain into another continental war.

MR. CLYNES
When Leader of His Majesty's Opposition, 1920–1922, with Mrs. Clynes.

In face of this grave warning, and with the country at large sick of fighting, the Government had to give in. Naval and other preparations were stopped, and Russia and Poland were left to settle their own quarrels without outside interference.

Government spokesmen did not fail to complain bitterly at Labour's decisive blow for peace. I was vilified by persons who said that I " had been dragged at the heels of extremists." The Prime Minister described our action as " the most formidable challenge ever made to democracy."

We issued no challenge to democracy. We knew our own people, and the people of Britain, and knew that they did not want to fight a war to set a Romanov sprig on the throne his fathers had so vilely misused.

Had we been able, by similar action, to prevent the 1914 conflagration, millions would be alive to-day who are now dead, and a Labour Government of Great Britain would have been put in power years before 1924.

During 1920 I was called upon to act as leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party, thus attaining the highest possible position in a movement I had joined, as a humble member, just under thirty years before. 1920

In those days we had not possessed a Parliamentary Party. Now I, an ex-mill hand, was within measurable distance, so people said, of becoming the first Labour Prime Minister, not so much through efforts of my own to seek distinction, as because of the unflinching loyalty and courage of the Labour rank and file.

Mr. J. H. Thomas and Mr. Stephen Walsh were my Vice-Chairmen, and my friend, Arthur Henderson, took the position of Chief Whip.

I soon discovered that a Labour Party leader in the House has to give the closest attention to Parliamentary duties for five days each week, frequently till a late hour, and sometimes all night. He must exert himself as propagandist and spokesman of his side. He is in demand at innumerable conferences and demonstrations. He must work in the closest touch with executives and committees, and toil ceaselessly behind the scenes in discharge of routine duties. He must, above all, be more approachable than the leader of any other Party.

He is not free to go where he chooses with the confidence that he will be loyally followed. He has often to defer to the views of his colleagues of all shades of opinion, and decide with them collectively, day by day, what their action is to be on Parliamentary and public questions.

With him lies the Parliamentary strategy and policy of his Party. One false move and he may wreck the hopes of his side for two or three years. He is watched with cruel assiduity by Members of other Parties, who hope to find in his words or deeds an opportunity for striking a blow at the future of their opposite side.

Prior to the General Election of 1922, I spent two years of the hardest labour I have ever known, not surpassed even by my work at the Food Ministry. Those two years ended with the consolation that Labour had won the favour of a greatly increased proportion of the British electorate and that the People's Party was nearer power than ever before. 1920

During 1920 we moved an important amendment, regretting that the Government proposed to ignore the report of the Committee it had set up to suggest ways of taxing excess war wealth. We also criticised strongly the Government's attitude on reparations, and warned the Coalition that their policy with regard to Germany would end in financial disaster and British unemployment increases.

We endeavoured to improve the conditions relating to old-age pensions, and introduced Bills to nationalise mines and railways, and to restrict certain rents.

In November, 1920, I took part with millions of others in a ceremony which left a deep impression in my mind. It was the funeral of the Unknown Soldier in Westminster, hitherto reserved as the private resting-place of the rich, the titled and the famous.

Six bodies of dead British soldiers were dug up from

Ypres, Arras, Cambrai and elsewhere where fighting had been thickest. They were selected at random, and no one knew their names. The bodies were placed in identical coffins, and an officer from another sector was brought, and placed his hand on one coffin.

It was taken to England in a destroyer, and accorded a field-marshal's salute at Dover. A special train brought it to London, and it was then carried on a gun-carriage to Whitehall, along a route guarded by picked men from all the British land, air and sea forces.

The Cenotaph—the Empty Tomb that symbolised the War's legacy of over a million graves of British soldiers on foreign soil—was unveiled ; and then King George, his sons, Cabinet Ministers, admirals, field-marshals and statesmen, marched with the soldier's coffin to the Abbey, where it was lowered into a marble vault.

I walked in that procession and listened to the moving words and solemn hymns of the wonderful memorial 1920 service at Westminster. It was a noble and touching tribute to all those millions who had died—but oh ! the pity of it, that they had to die in such a useless slaughter !

Shall Britain ever sanction such another ?

Shortly after the ceremony the Prime Minister was asked in the Commons whether the name of the person who first made the suggestion for the bringing of an unknown soldier to Westminster might be made known. Mr. Lloyd George declined to grant this request.

But it has been said that King George himself, on one of his war-time visits to France, looked round among the crosses, and said : " A body should be brought from some such place as this and placed in Westminster Abbey, as a sign of national mourning and respect for those men in my armies who die in this war, and as a reminder never to enter another."

The year 1921 passed swiftly for me, engaged as I was in my new duties as Parliamentary Labour leader. On one occasion during that year I led the Labour Party out of the House of Commons as a public protest against

Government carelessness of the now dire need of Britain's increasing unemployed ; but we were as yet too weak to interfere effectively on their behalf, and our absence served us no better than our presence.

We had to sit and listen to men who had never known what it was to hunger, or to fear the injustice of an employer's whim, callously dismiss, with airy gestures and scornful words, all our passionate pleas on behalf of our own people. But the time was coming when Parliamentary Labour should cease to be a Conservative joke, and already we knew it.

Towards the end of 1921 Will Crooks died, worth only a few pounds, though he had served Labour gallantly for over thirty years. A public subscription was raised shortly after to support his widow.

1921 It is often said by the opponents of Labour that the workers' leaders never fail to feather their own nests. This is not even a plausible lie. I have told of Crooks' financial reward for a life-time of service. Keir Hardie died almost penniless. There are many other similar examples.

We serve our kind because we feel we must do so. There are many who could have made more money by deserting Labour interests and taking other positions either in commerce or politics. Most of us have been given ample opportunities to do so.

During 1922, I was sharply criticised by certain political extremists because I accepted an invitation to attend the marriage of King George's only daughter, Princess Mary, at Westminster.

I considered the invitation an honour, not to me so much as to the Party I led in Parliament. I remember the time when Labour complained bitterly because it was contemptuously excluded from all royal ceremonies. In 1922 I felt that the vast majority of Labour voters throughout Great Britain would like to be represented at a wedding to which they obviously offered their good wishes.

It has never seemed necessary to me to behave like a boor in order to show that I belong to the working classes ;

I have preferred to demonstrate my loyalties by service in their cause.

In the annual report of the Labour Party in September, 1922, Mr. Henderson and I issued a statement criticising the work of the Coalition Government. Our report concluded :

> " The sooner the record of this Government is submitted to the electors, and the sooner this Parliament is purged, the better for the welfare of the nation."

Within a few weeks that event came to pass through no act of ours. For some time secret discussions had been held by the Conservative leaders, who felt that sufficient time had now elapsed since the end of the War for a great part of Mr. Lloyd George's personal magnetism in Britain to have dissipated.

They had always resented serving under a Liberal leader, and had only accepted the terms of Lloyd George's " Coupon Election " of 1918 so as to keep a preponderance 1922 of Members in the Commons, and to prevent Labour successes at the polls.

Now they felt strong enough to throw the captain overboard and take charge of the ship. Sir George Younger, Mr. Baldwin and Sir Austen Chamberlain, backed by other die-hard Tories, made various moves, and a critical meeting was called at the Carlton Club, where a Conservative breakaway from the Coalition was decided upon.

When this news was carried to Mr. Lloyd George he immediately resigned his position as Prime Minister, and a General Election was announced by his successor, Mr. Bonar Law, to take place in November, 1922.

I went back to my constituency in Manchester, and set my election campaign going with a number of meetings. During this campaign I received a tribute which I have always valued.

A group of a score or so of schoolchildren, armed with a miscellaneous selection of very large dustbin-lids, which they used as cymbals, and bearing banners and rosettes in my interest, materialised quite spontaneously, and marched persistently through the streets of Manchester canvassing electors in my favour.

They became known as "Clynes's Band," and are so known to this day. The original "bandsmen" must long since have grown up, but at each successive General Election a schoolboy band of ever-increasing numbers, its members always under fourteen years old or so, turns out loyally, and marches through the Manchester murk, with "drums" beating and colours flying, and urges the electorate to "Vote for Clynes!"

Where these lads get to between elections I have no idea. How they started I cannot imagine—certainly through no request of mine.

But I must admit to a thrill of pleasure whenever I see them marching by.

When the results of the Manchester polling were announced in 1922, I found that I had retained my seat by a comfortable majority. 1922

I watched the results being flashed along an illuminated sign that night, and as I stood amid an excited crowd in the November fog, I realised that a great change was taking place in British political history. Time after time the running letters in front of us announced:

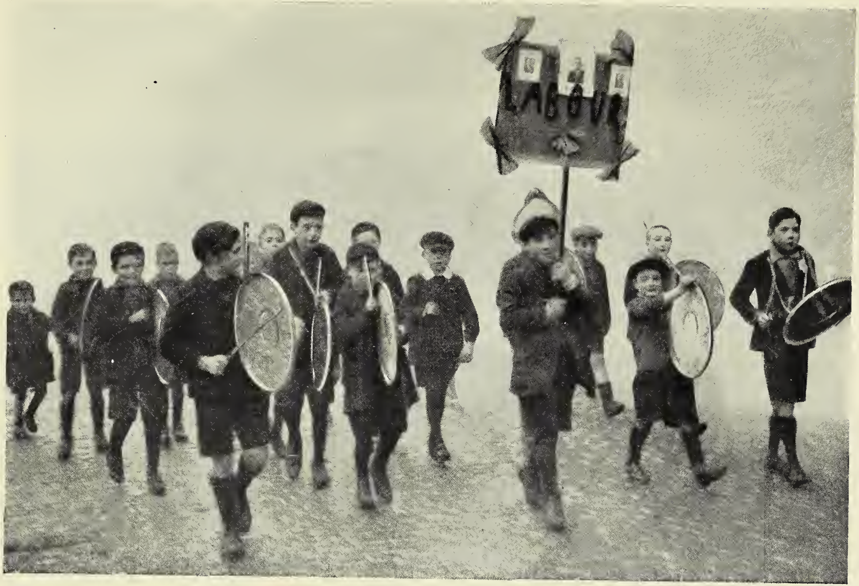
LABOUR GAIN . . . LABOUR GAIN . . . LABOUR GAIN . . .

We had put 414 candidates in the field. We doubled our vote over the figures of the last General Election, and gained no less than 67 seats, making our total strength in the House of Commons up to 142 seats.

For the first time in history British Labour was now His Majesty's Opposition at Westminster.

Hitherto Liberals and Conservatives had taken turns to rule the country. Each side, when out of power, knew inevitably that its chance would come next. Each could lay plans and formulate policies at leisure, years before they were required.

Now, a new element had entered into the struggle. Labour, which had been growing slowly at Westminster



CLYNES'S BAND, MANCHESTER
General Election, 1922.

for sixteen years, and whose pioneers had planned and struggled for democratic control for years before that, stood, in all human probability, next in the line of political succession.

The day might arrive at any time when the King would send for a working man and say to him: "For the first time, I must entrust the government of forty millions of my subjects to your hands. What will you do with them?"

When the Labour Party gathered itself together after its wonderful victory at the polls in 1922, I was that working man for whom the King might send. I had led the Party in the Commons for two years, with the result that the electors of Britain had so far approved as to send us back to Westminster as the official Opposition to the Government they had chosen.

I cannot pretend that I did not feel a great measure of personal triumph in the fact that I might in due course become Prime Minister. But far transcending any 1922 personal emotion was a great sensation of thankfulness that, in so short a time, Labour should have risen to a place where, by its own efforts, it would soon effect great benefits for the patient millions of its own people who had waited so long, and suffered such privations, to see this hour.

When the Parliamentary Labour Party met to elect its leaders for the coming Parliament, the names of Ramsay MacDonald and myself were proposed for the post of Chairman and leader of the Party.

I had served as leader since 1920. I had, indeed, been pressed to undertake the leadership previously, but it was a whole-time job, and I did not feel that I should give up my Trade Union work until a stage was reached, as happened in 1920, when the political needs of the moment could no longer be denied.

I hope that nothing I may say further on the subject will cause anyone to conclude that I harbour the slightest personal feeling against MacDonald because he eventually replaced me. Indeed, when I was beaten by a few votes, I felt that he had rid me of a burden rather than robbed me of any ambition to become the first Labour Prime Minister.

Between 1920 and 1922 the Party grew stronger outside the House of Commons, and within it. In the 1922 election we polled over 4,300,000 votes. This was a triumph indeed for the Party which had polled just over 300,000 votes in 1906, when I first entered Parliament. We were now the second largest Party in Parliament, and in the country.

Among a large number of my colleagues there was now the feeling that I ought to continue the leadership, and I therefore accepted nomination at the Party meeting to choose a leader.

I little knew, however, the preparations which had been hastily made to secure the election of MacDonald. It has been stated since that my name was universally expected to gain most votes.

1922 But MacDonald, who had been out of Parliament for four years, had gained the support of certain of the left-wing group, who demanded more demonstrations in the Commons than I was prepared to approve.

When the result was declared it was found that he had gained five more votes than I. I was told that many who had intended to support me had been so sure of my election that they were not present at the meeting.

Thus MacDonald became our leader and future Prime Minister elect. I was asked to act as Deputy-Chairman of the Party, which I agreed to do.

Since that time Ramsay MacDonald has struck such a blow at British Labour as will never be forgotten, though it will be survived. It is possible that, had I been able to see into the future, I might have taken another line of action in 1922 which would have deprived him of the power to strike that blow.

I was not in the least troubled by my defeat at the time, but when, later, I learned of the complicated plans and schemes made for my defeat, I confess feeling that some of my colleagues had been ungrateful as well as disloyal, in face of the previous two years of work which had been so successful in securing Labour's return as the Official Opposition.

Viscount Snowden, then Mr. Philip Snowden, M.P., has published some comments which make interesting reading. He says that his own view was that MacDonald was not likely to give sound leadership, and would fail the Party.

MacDonald, however, says Snowden, had recently been wooing the support of the Left Wing in apparent contrast to his previous attitude.

Snowden had closely followed our work in the House from the end of the War to the time when I took office, and he has been good enough to write :

> " Mr. Clynes had considerable qualifications for Parliamentary leadership. He was an exceptionally able speaker, a keen and incisive debater, had wide experience of industrial questions, and a good knowledge of general political issues. In the Labour Party conferences when ' the platform ' got into difficulties with the delegates, Mr. Clynes was usually put up to calm the storm. As leader of the Parliamentary group in the Coalition Parliament, Mr. Clynes had a task of extreme difficulty. He had a team which in the main was untrained in Parliamentary work, unused to stern discipline, and unable to render him effective help in the Parliamentary debates." 1922

As I say, I had very little feeling about being superseded until I learned more of what had taken place.

Snowden goes on to say :

> " I attended the meeting of the I.L.P. members, which was held at the office in Fleet Street, and took part in the conversation as to whom we should support. I was opposed for several reasons to Mr. MacDonald accepting the position at that time. He had been out of Parliament for four years, and Mr. Clynes had held the position of chairman in very difficult circumstances, and had done as well as anyone could be expected to do under the circumstances prevailing. I felt that it was not fair to oppose his re-election to the position."

After his victory MacDonald wrote :

> "I take an opportunity of doing homage to my predecessor in office, Mr. Clynes. His loyalty has been magnificent, and has set for everyone an example so conspicuously fine that no one can fail to be moved by it. . . . In what I myself felt it was my duty to do, I was moved by what I considered were the best interests of the Party, and Mr. Clynes as a colleague has been perfect."

The facts have been further stated in an interesting book by David Kirkwood, M.P., under the title of *My Life of Revolt.* The following paragraphs from the book are given in a candid account of meetings of the Clyde group and I.L.P. supporters. They were resolved to secure the election of MacDonald, and "so open the path to all his future greatness—and failure."

> "The problem that was uppermost in the minds of the people we met was not what we were to achieve but who was to be our leader. We had no doubt. We were Ramsay MacDonald's men. 1922
>
> "At last we reached the full meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party. MacDonald's men sat on the right-hand side of the room.
>
> "On the left side sat the men who supported Mr. Clynes of the General Workers' Union, Food Controller in 1918, and Chairman of the Labour Party in the House of Commons in 1921–1922. With him were the trade union members.
>
> "Nature had dealt unevenly with these men. She had endowed MacDonald with a magnificent presence, a full, resonant voice, and a splendid dignity. Clynes was small, unassuming, of uneven features, and voice without colour
>
> "There they sat : Clynes at ease and indifferent ; MacDonald with his head in his hands, looking drawn, anxious and ill.
>
> "When the votes were counted, MacDonald was elected by a narrow majority. The Clyde men had supported him solidly. His majority was less than the number of their votes.

> "The result acted like magic on MacDonald. He sat up at once. All the lassitude and illness disappeared. He was as vigorous as any man in the room. John Wheatley looked at me and shrugged his shoulders. His uneasiness was growing. Clynes never turned a hair.
>
> "That evening we were to have a great demonstration of welcome to the new Leader at Kingsway Hall.
>
> "MacDonald did not appear! Clynes gallantly took his place, and made a magnificent speech, ringing with loyalty and unity. That night he rose very high in our estimation.
>
> "When the House met, Labour had become for the first time His Majesty's Opposition, and Ramsay MacDonald the Leader."

In the new Parliament, which met in November, 1922, the Tories held a tremendous majority over us; and the Liberals were reduced to a mere ghost of their former power.

The country had given an outspoken expression of opinion on the Coalition that had promised so much and achieved so little. We were faced with a grave situation 1922 in foreign affairs and at home. World finance was rocking; monarchies were passing; republics were trampled beneath the heel of dictators.

In the Commons Bonar Law and Baldwin offered verbal soothing syrup to quiet the national and international fever, and said: "You can trust us!" Lloyd George, the former Premier, crouched beneath his elf-locks in an inconspicuous corner, like a wizard who had failed to work spells and had fallen from power to obscurity.

In the few weeks that remained before the 1922 session ended, the Labour Party was able to move important amendments on the subjects of unemployment and foreign policy.

In the latter field our objections were subject, within a very short time, to some of the most dramatic proofs the world has ever known.

Mussolini, in Italy, gathered his blackshirt bands for a dramatic move. With 40,000 trained fighters at his back he demanded the abandonment of the last pretence at democratic government, and set himself up as Dictator with powers equal to those of the great Napoleon, save that he retained a king to sign his principal decrees.

Since that day the Italian blacksmith's son has hammered all Europe out of shape, humbled Greece, bred a new pride in Italy (which he has served splendidly, if arrogantly), and embarked on adventures in Africa and elsewhere whose repercussions may yet shake empires.

His example has been followed in Hungary, Spain and Germany, not always with success. Blackshirt Europe is now a tremendous and not too well restrained force ; the shadow of Benito Mussolini looms larger across the map than ever before.

While Parliament was in vacation, the news re-echoed like a thunderclap across the world that columns
1922 of French troops, with steel helmets, rumbling artillery, tanks and aeroplanes, were pouring into the Ruhr, which is the " Black Country " of Germany.

Maddened because the fantastic reparations demanded under the Peace Treaty terms could not be paid quickly enough, M. Poincaré, Premier of France and himself frontier-born and steeped in hate and fear of Germany, sent his armies tax-gathering.

The result was very much what might be expected if American troops marched with horse, foot and guns into Manchester, Sheffield and Liverpool, and demanded money and goods with which to settle our war debt to the United States.

In the Ruhr, industrial town is joined to industrial town by unbroken areas of mines, factories and steel-works. Railway-lines network the land.

Germany had lost two of her three coal-producing areas—the Saar and Silesia—under the Peace Treaty terms. Now France commandeered all the coal she had left.

Unemployment in Germany leapt to over a million.

Marks, worth about one shilling each before the War, danced downward into chaos, till a shilling would purchase 2,500,000,000 of them.

Before the French soldiers marched out of the ruined German industrial belt, France had forged, with Ruhr coal amid the despoiled Ruhr ironworks, the iron swastika of Nazi-ism. Thus by French hammer-blows on the anvil of Destiny was beaten out a symbol that was soon to hang, like the sword of Damocles, over the heads of future French statesmen. 1922

Chapter XXIV

1922–1924—Labour in Opposition—Critical political situation—Labour declares for a Capital Levy—Bonar Law retires—Baldwin becomes Premier—Death of Bonar Law—2,000,000 unemployed—Tory Protectionist policy declared—A critical General Election—Mussolini creates a new Serajevo situation—Rise of Adolf Hitler—Labour on the eve of power—Dangers of taking office—A momentous luncheon-party—I move a " No Confidence " vote—Fall of the Government—Sent for by King George—Labour in power.

When Parliament met in 1923, with Labour on the Opposition benches, the political situation could hardly have been more critical.

Misery and want at home, black as they appeared, were overshadowed by the thunderclouds from the Ruhr. French troops there were holding down a sullen 1923 population by the force of martial law ; executions of civilians and furtive sniping of French soldiers had already become almost everyday affairs.

Germany at large, crippled and terrified, unable to resist the French peace-time invasion, waited in hate and fear, hopelessly seeking interference from France's allies, whom France was openly daring to raise a finger.

Long and anxious debates were held in the Commons, both on the Franco-German and the Italian situations.

In February the Liberals moved an amendment to the King's Speech, stating that securities against French aggression in Germany should be offered by the League of Nations. Arthur Henderson, on behalf of Labour, supported the Liberal view, when he said :

> " It is because we believe that the policy now being pursued towards Germany by France is a danger to the

> peace of Europe, and because we are convinced that it will not achieve the end for which it was professedly conceived that we are strongly, and I think I may say unitedly, opposing it."

Early in the session a debate was held on the subject of unemployment, which the Labour Party had referred to in a strongly worded amendment to the King's Speech, which had nothing to say of our growing total of out-of-works. During this debate Mr. MacDonald deplored the "dole" on the ground that "money subsidy without labour is a last resort," and boldly outlined Labour policy with regard to the nationalisation of our key industries.

He also spoke clearly on the necessity of a capital levy, pointing out that we were finding £300,000,000 a year as tribute towards the National Debt, almost all of which was paying for war costs, and indicating that British industry must find some other way of reducing that debt than by taxation of industry itself. 1923

Our view was that industry could not stand the drain of about a million pounds a day to pay for past wars. We proposed simply that every person owning property worth over £5000 should write down a proportion of his property above that level as belonging to the State. There would be no disturbance of capital; no increase in unemployment; it would simply be that a number of pieces of paper would change hands. No employer would be ruined; no want would be caused.

Certain rich men would become less rich, on paper; but since one man can only eat a certain amount of food and occupy a certain number of rooms each day, even the rich would suffer only in their minds.

By using the accumulation of wealth thus collected for State purposes, the National Debt could have been greatly reduced or written off, and our industry would have received such a stimulus that every man, woman and child in the country would have become healthier, happier and—in 99 per cent of cases—richer.

I shall explain the Labour policy towards capital more fully in my second volume of *Memoirs*. This brief outline is sufficient to show that the " terrible " capital levy is not really so dreadful after all. But our ideas were hysterically opposed in 1923.

None the less the capital levy still remains an integral part of the Labour programme ; and when we are strong enough in Parliament, we shall put it into practice.

All forms of taxation have been bitterly opposed ; this one will not be less so. But all financial experts know now that it will benefit the vast majority of the nation by taking away from a tiny and powerful section an accumulation of nominal wealth which they cannot use, but which they guard like curs in the manger. After it is all over, they will still be rich men ; the difference will be that there will speedily be no more slums, no more starving children, and very little unemployment.

One of the things Labour was able to do while in 1923 Opposition was to force through the abolition of what was known in the Army as "Field Punishment No. 1." This savage punishment was also known—much more graphically, by the men themselves—as " crucifixion."

In May, 1923, Mr. Bonar Law, the Prime Minister, sent in his resignation to the King. He had been ill for some time, and had broken down on several occasions while speaking in the House.

Everyone expected that Lord Curzon would succeed him as leader of the Tory Party. But Mr. Baldwin was chosen, despite the fact that he had, at that time, little experience of Ministerial work.

During the year several new efforts were made by the Parliamentary Labour Party to draw the attention of the nation to the need for nationalising coal mines, land and other properties of national importance.

The year passed quickly for us, busied as we were not only with our work in the Commons, but also with our preparations for the day when Labour should be asked to form a Government—a time that could not now be long delayed. When we went to the polls next time we intended to come back strong enough to rule the country.

In November all Members of the House were saddened at the news of Mr. Bonar Law's death, shortly before Armistice Day. He had been a dying man when I last saw him at Westminster, but we had all hoped that he might enjoy a few years of the retirement he had so faithfully earned.

Bonar Law was never a brilliant Parliamentary figure, but he was sound, critical and wise. He refused to take risks; he was unflinchingly loyal; his followers trusted him, and his opponents respected and liked him. He put the good of the country before the good of his Party—a quality becoming much less apparent in Parliament as the years go by.

With his passing a new spirit became evident in the Tory ranks. A sensation was caused when Mr. Baldwin announced a new Conservative policy of Protection as a fumbling move to assist unemployment; there were, by this time, over 2,000,000 people out of work in Great Britain.

On November 2nd he declared a policy which included a tax on a considerable number of imports, among which were several foods essential to poor people in England; a preference in the case of Dominion goods was promised, so as to help our Colonies in their post-War unemployment and trade depression. This speech was delivered, by a cynical twist of chance, in the Free Trade Hall, at Manchester, and caused a great deal of excitement throughout the country. 1923

Labour unhesitatingly opposed this policy of taxing the breakfast-table of the poor so as to protect the pockets of the rich British manufacturers. Its uselessness as a cure for unemployment was patently obvious, and was shown clearly within the next few months.

Feeling the weight of Labour and Liberal opposition to his new programme, Mr. Baldwin advised the King to dissolve Parliament on November 13th, and we went to the country on a clear issue—Free Trade or Protection.

Meanwhile, affairs abroad became more perplexing every day. Mussolini, enraged at the murder of some

Italian diplomats in northern Greece, defied the League of Nations, sent Athens an ultimatum as harsh as that which Austria sent to Belgrade to start the World War, and, when Greece would not unconditionally accept, sent his warships to bombard the Greek island of Corfu, killed many people, seized the island, and breathed fire and sword till Greece humbled herself in the dust.

In Germany, inspired by his example, a new figure suddenly emerged in the person of Adolf Hitler, an Austrian house-painter. Backed by a citizen army with rubber truncheons, Hitler strode into a meeting of the Bavarian Parliament, summarily disbanded it, and proclaimed himself Dictator of Germany, with Ludendorff, still a popular hero, as his Commander-in-Chief.

His power was short-lived, and his bold blow for the dictatorship was struck aside a few days later, when rifles and machine-guns opposed his men's rubber truncheons, and his "storm-troopers" were temporarily disbanded. But in the figure of this new "Little
1923 Corporal," Germany saw her future saviour from the Napoleonic invaders of her ruined industrial Ruhr area, and Hitler, disgraced for the moment, knew he would rise later to almost imperial heights.

Disturbed by these foreign activities, the people of Britain went to the polls in December, 1923, uncertain which political party could accord them prosperity at home and peace abroad.

I won my seat once more in Manchester; and good news came swiftly from almost all over the country, of Labour successes, though Arthur Henderson was narrowly beaten by a combined Liberal and Conservative vote in Newcastle.

When the results were reckoned it was found that Labour had increased its hold spectacularly once again, having gained 53 seats, giving us a total of 191 Parliamentary representatives. The Conservatives had lost 86 seats, reducing them to 258.

One hundred and fifty-eight Liberals now held the balance of power between us and the Tories ; and, as the Liberals naturally opposed the Government programme on Protection, it was obvious that we should soon be given our chance to lead the House.

We were now on the horns of a dilemma. At an informal luncheon which I attended, together with most of the Labour Party leaders, immediately after the election results were declared, we thrashed out the whole matter.

If, when our chance came, we accepted the task of forming a Government, we were absolutely at the mercy of the Liberals—a " kept " Party whom Asquith could show the door the moment we ceased to please him.

We had to face unprecedented difficulties in foreign affairs, with Mussolini flouting the League and holding a pistol at the head of anyone who opposed his imperialist policy, and France harassing disarmed Germany at the bayonet-point, while supporting Italy so as to gain an ally for her own high-handed actions. 1923

At home unemployment had never been so bad, and those of us who had studied the situation of world trade knew quite well that European financial collapse was almost upon us, and the world trade depression just round the corner. As MacDonald said at the time :

> " God knows full well that none of us wants office now. None of us wants to face this mess. But somebody has got to do it."

It had occurred to none of us, in our long and uphill fight for Labour power, that political juggling would leave us two such difficult alternatives when that power was offered us. " Give them enough rope and they'll hang themselves," was always the Tory motto about us ; now they had given us the rope and left us facing such a desperate situation that " hanging " looked to one or two of us to be the only way out.

In fact at the luncheon where our policy was discussed, one member suggested that we should stage our own political execution. He proposed that we should take control simply to formulate a King's Speech which would so antagonise the Liberals by its Socialist programme that they would instantly put us out of office. It was supposed that such an action might increase the confidence of our electorate in our uncompromising character, without giving us the responsibility of government until circumstances became more favourable.

This view was an absurd one. Such a theatrical gesture would have shown us to be self-seekers, and mere fair-weather friends of the British working classes. I unhesitatingly opposed such action, and argued that it was our duty to try to improve Britain's position, for the sake of the millions of poor people who trusted us and who had sent us to Westminster to represent them.

If we were set back politically by our failure to bring a golden dawn out of the blackest hours since August, 1914, then at least we should have failed in the spirit 1924 of such pioneers as Hardie and Bruce Glasier. If we succeeded, then the greater the difficulty the greater the glory.

All of us felt at the time that a great responsibility rested upon us. The Tories, it was obvious, would soon set us a challenge to our courage. Timid generalship would have meant disaster, and complete loss of trust by the country in the whole Labour movement. I shall never regret that before the luncheon-party broke up we had decided in favour of taking office as soon as the chance should be offered us.

Nor had we long to wait. Mr. Baldwin's Government produced a King's Speech obviously intended to set a standard which no rival Party could possibly follow, in view of the world situation at the time. This Speech was offered as though Britain were at the height of a prosperity wave, and promised hosts of good things which the Conservatives themselves could not conceivably produce. But, since they knew they were fated to fall from power and would not have to make good their boasts, they were setting an example beside

THE "BIG FIVE" IN THE FIRST LABOUR GOVERNMENT, 1924

Left to Right : J. H. Thomas, Philip Snowden, Ramsay MacDonald, J. R. Clynes, Arthur Henderson.

which any King's Speech of realities, formulated by Labour, would seem gloomy indeed.

It fell to my lot to move a vote of No Confidence in the debate on the King's Speech. The atmosphere in the House was electric when the Speaker named me, and I rose.

Mr. Asquith followed, on behalf of the Liberal Party, and boldly denounced the attitude of our opponents. This action was very courageous on his part; I think he might have appealed more strongly to Liberal voters by taking a neutral line, but such a cheating of Parliamentary Labour might well have had most serious repercussions in the country.

After three days of excited debating, my amendment was carried by 328 votes to 256. Mr. Baldwin immediately sent in his resignation.

And then, after eighteen years of unbroken service in the House of Commons, I saw the first-fruits of that harvest for which Labour prophets and workers had 1924 toiled together throughout the past century. The arrogant Tories and the powerful Liberals were scattered; the Working Men's Party, so long a joke, had become a Government, though only with Liberal aid.

King George sent for Mr. MacDonald. Arthur Henderson, J. H. Thomas and myself accompanied our leader to Buckingham Palace to that fateful interview of which we had dreamed, when a British Sovereign should entrust the affairs of the Empire to the hands of the people's own representatives.

As we stood waiting for His Majesty, amid the gold and crimson magnificence of the Palace, I could not help marvelling at the strange turn of Fortune's wheel, which had brought MacDonald the starveling clerk, Thomas the engine-driver, Henderson the foundry labourer and Clynes the mill-hand, to this pinnacle beside the man whose forebears had been kings for so many splendid generations. We were making history!

We were, perhaps, somewhat embarrassed, but the little, quiet man whom we addressed as "Your Majesty" swiftly put us at our ease. He was himself rather anxious ; his was a great responsibility, and I have no doubt that he had read the wild statements of some of our extremists, and I think he wondered to what he was committing his people.

The King first created MacDonald a Privy Councillor, and then spoke to us for some time. He gave us invaluable guidance, from his deep experience, to help us in the difficult time before us when we should become his principal Ministers. I had expected to find him unbending ; instead, he was kindness and sympathy itself. Before he gave us leave to go he made an appeal to us that I have never forgotten :

1924

> " The immediate future of my people, and their whole happiness, is in your hands, gentlemen. They depend upon your prudence and sagacity."

How Labour, in power and in opposition, tried thereafter to be worthy of that trust, I shall endeavour to show in my next volume.

The second volume, to follow later, tells the inside story of the State intrigues and international emergencies of our own times.

A creator of the Labour Party, Mr. Clynes tells how he became Lord Privy Seal and Deputy-Leader of the House of Commons in the first British Labour Government in history. MacDonald, the Premier, was much absent, and Clynes " held the fort " at Westminster. We learn hitherto untold facts about the Campbell sensation, which unseated the Government, the Zinoviev Letter forgeries, and the real reasons for the Arcos Raid. Then Labour returns to office, and Clynes becomes Home Secretary.

The ex-barefoot cotton " piecer " has to tackle grave State problems, be in constant contact with the King, and shape legislation affecting all our lives. Himself disapproving of Capital Punishment, he has to consider Appeals for reprieve that if dismissed would send men to the gallows. He describes his attendance at a Royal birth, and writes absorbing chapters on necessary changes in prisons, murder trials, and other phases of the British legal system.

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This book is essential to the student, and enthralling to the idle reader.

INDEX

A

Adamson, W., 274
Agadir Incident, 150–3
Air Raids, London, 212, 262–3
Aisne, Battles of, 246, 264
Allen, Commandant M., 148
Allen, Sir T., 240
Allenby, Gen., 245
Amiens, Battle of, 264
Antwerp, Siege of, 180
Asquith, H. H., 53, 119, 127, 128, 133, 136, 143, 145, 146, 148, 149, 153, 160, 167, 168, 173, 180, 187, 188, 190, 198, 199, 202, 203, 275, 314, 341, 343
Astor, Lord, 257, 290, 292, 301

B

Baldwin, Earl, 158, 299, 327, 333, 338, 339, 342, 343
Balfour, Earl, 119, 145, 155, 301
Barnes, Geo., 136, 145, 150, 204
Beatty, Admiral, 298
Bell, R., 92
Beveridge, Sir W., 291
Birkenhead, Lord, 121, 122, 145, 179
Birrell, Augustine, 106, 119
"Black Friday," 320
Blatchford, R., 70
Bondfield, Margaret, 70, 101, 245
Brace, W., 188
Bramley, F., 101
Bright, John, 305
Burns, John, 52, 53, 54, 120, 124, 138, 173
Burt, T., 22
Byrne, M., 39–42

C

Campbell-Bannerman, Sir H., 110, 116, 120, 127, 132
Capital Levy, 295, 337
Caporetto, Battle of, 229
Carpenter, E., 86
Carson, Lord, 160
Casement, Sir R., 312–3
Cavendish, Lord, 308
Cecil, Lord R., 279
Chamberlain, Sir A., 119, 327
Chamberlain, Joseph, 100, 103, 108, 110, 119
Chamberlain, Neville, 119
Charlton, Air-Commodore, 263
Churchill, Winston, 96, 97, 107, 108, 119, 128, 135, 156, 164, 180, 185, 221, 322

Clemenceau, President, 276, 278, 283
Clynes, Mrs. J. R., 50, 51, 64, 139
Clynes, Patrick, 27, 303
" Clynes's Band," 328
Coller, F. H., 291
Collins, Michael, 316
Conference, 1892, Bradford, 69
  1893, 70
  1893, Zurich, 71
  1893, Belfast, 75
  1894, Norwich, 76
  1898, Birmingham, 86
  1899, London, 87
  1900, London, 88
  1909, Portsmouth, 138–9
  1909, Toronto, 139
  1915, Inter-Allied Soc., London, 184
  1915, Norwich, 186
  1917, Birmingham, 208–9
  1917, Stockholm, 211
  1918, T.U.C., 260
Connell, Jim, 86
Conscription, 190, 198–200
Consumers' Council, 237, 239, 240
Conway, Kathrine St. J. (*see* Mrs. Glasier)
Cramp, C. T., 237, 299
Crooks, Will, 99, 101, 136, 143, 144, 326
Curran, Pete, 70, 75
Curzon, Lord, 122, 338

D

Dardanelles, Attack on, 185
Davitt, M., 306, 309
Daylight Saving Bill, 135
De Valera, President, 315, 316
Devlin, J., 309
Devonport, Lord, 213, 218, 292
Dillon, J., 160, 309
Disraeli, B., 19, 304

E

Edward VII, H.M. King, 7, 118, 143
Edward VIII, H.M. King, 24

F

Fergusson, Sir J., 106, 107, 109
Fisher, Lord, 181, 185
Foch, Gen., 253, 269, 270, 279, 283, 298
" Fourteen Points " Peace Plan, 244
Fox, Tom, 105
French, Gen., 315

G

George V, H.M. King, 143, 145, 146, 150, 167, 168, 169, 298, 325, 326, 343–4
George, D. Lloyd, 24, 92, 119, 120, 123, 128, 131, 132, 135, 143, 150, 154, 155, 161, 177, 181, 182, 187, 188, 200, 201, 203, 204, 206, 211, 213, 214,

225, 253, 256, 271, 272, 274, 275, 278, 283, 284, 289, 299, 301, 302, 315, 319, 323, 325, 327, 333
German Peace Offers, 202, 203, 207, 228, 245, 266
Gladstone, W. E., 132, 307, 308
Glasier, B., 77, 342
Glasier, Mrs. B., 79, 101
Gompers, S., 140
Gough, Gen., 230
Grey, Sir E., 134, 148, 151, 162, 164, 167, 168, 169, 171, 172
Griffiths, Arthur, 310, 316
Griffiths, Col. N., 206

H

Haig, Gen., 231, 298
Haldane, Lord, 120
Hampshire, H.M.S., Sinking of, 201
Hardie, Keir, 22–5, 70, 76, 87, 88, 89, 92, 93, 126, 165, 173, 184, 189, 326, 342
Harper, Mary (*see* Mrs. Clynes)
Haslam, J., 56
Healy, Tim, 160, 309
Henderson, A., 110, 126, 136, 165, 172, 188, 189, 204, 210–2, 265, 274, 322, 323, 327, 336, 340, 343
Hindenburg, Gen., 267
Hitler, Adolf, 283, 340
Hodge, J., 204
Hodges, F., 319
Hollweg, Bethmann, 156, 202, 207, 222
Hoover, President, 257, 298
Hyndham, H. M., 237–9, 240

J

Jaurès, Jean, 164, 165
Jellicoe, Admiral, 254
Joffre, Gen., 298
Jones, Lief, 242
Jowett, F. W., 110, 173, 274
Jutland, Battle of, 206

K

Kenney, Annie, 148
Keyes, Admiral, 248
Kirkwood, D., 209, 332
Kitchener, Gen., 178, 182, 185, 189, 190, 200, 201, 206
Kut, Battle of, 206

L

Labour Representation League, 21, 88, 92
Lalor, J. F., 306
Lansbury, G., 143
Law, Bonar, 155, 169, 203, 319, 327, 333, 338, 339
Lawrence, Col. T. E., 245
League of Nations, 245
Lenin, N., 103, 209, 275
Lichnowsky, Prince, 167, 171
Lincoln, Trebitsch, 181
Lowther, Speaker, 115

Ludendorff, Gen., 230, 246, 264, 267, 340
Lusitania, R.M.S., Sinking of, 221

M

Macdonald, Alex., 22
Macdonald, James, 88–9
MacDonald, J. Ramsay, 70, 88, 90–2, 100, 110, 124, 127, 145, 153, 157, 165, 170, 172, 274, 329–33, 337, 341, 343, 344
MacDonald, Mrs. J. R., 91, 101, 153
McKenna, S., 120, 134, 275
Macnamara, Dr., 128, 132
Manchester Martyrs, 305
Mann, T., 54, 70, 154
Markievicz, Countess, 301
Marne, Battle of, 179
Martyn, Caroline, 101
Mary, H.R.H. Princess, 326
Mawdsley, J., 96
Mons, Battles of, 267
Morley, Lord, 120, 173
Morris, William, 54, 55
Mussolini, B., 333, 339, 341

N

Nivelle, Gen., 205

O

O'Brien, W., 160, 309
O'Connell, Daniel, 303
O'Connor, T. P., 160, 309
Odger, G., 21
Osborne Judgment, 131
Ostend and Zeebrugge Raids, 248–9

P

Pankhurst, Mrs., 70, 101, 102, 148
Parnell, C. S., 305, 306, 308
Passchendaele, Battle of, 205
Peronne, Battle of, 264
Pershing, Gen., 298
Philips, Marion, 101
Phœnix Park Murders, 308
Piave, Battles of, 250, 266
Pilsudski, Gen., 322
Poincare, President, 333

R

Rasputin, G., 209
Rathcredan, Lord, 237
Redmond, J. E., 159, 160, 170, 309, 311, 312
Rhondda, Lord, 213, 214, 221, 222, 234, 236, 237, 242, 251, 252–3, 292
Richardson, T., 173
Roberts, G. H., 156, 188, 274
Ruhr Invasion, 334–6
Runciman, Lord, 120, 275

S

St. Quentin, Battle of, 230–2
Samuel, Lord, 120, 275
Scarborough and Whitby shelled, 182
Seely, Gen., 1227, 31

Selborne, Lady, 237
Serajevo Incident, 162
Sexton, Sir J., 99, 100, 105, 309
Shackleton, D., 98, 126
Shaw, G. B., 52, 55, 71–4, 88, 274, 311
Simon, Sir J., 200, 275
Smillie, R., 213
Smith, F. E. (*see* Birkenhead)
Smuts, Gen., 281
Snowden, Lord, 70, 88, 91, 100, 110, 121, 157, 173, 187, 202, 274, 331
Snowden, Lady, 101
Somme, Battle of, 205
Stacey, Enid, 101
Stringer, Pte., V.C., 190
Sullivan, T. D., 305
Syrett, H. S., 290

T

Taff Vale Decision, 93
Thomas, J. H., 136, 299, 320, 321, 323, 343
Thompson, Gen., 315–6
Thompson, Sir Henry, 260
Thorne, Will, 63–4
Tillett, B., 54, 70
Titanic, R.M.S., Enquiry, 15
Tolpuddle Martyrs, 67
Toole, J., 108
Trotsky, L., 209

V

Versailles Treaty, 177, 276–87
Victoria, H.M. Queen, 93
Von Ballin, 267
Von Turpitz, Admiral, 267

W

Walsh, S., 110, 121, 323
Walton, Sydney, 290
Ward, J., 114, 125
Wheatley, J., 333
Williams, Evan, 319
Wilson, President, 202, 207, 228, 244, 266, 279, 284
Wise, F. E., 291
Wolff, Theodor, 207
Women's Suffrage, 148, 149
Wrangel, Gen., 322

Y

Younger, Sir G., 327
Ypres, Battles of, 184, 229

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